This is a place holder for **page 2**

….the advertisement behind the front cover

J. E. SMITH
President
National Radio Institute
Established 25 Years

I WILL SEND A SAMPLE LESSON FREE to PROVE I can Train You at Home in Spare Time for GOOD RADIO JOBS

I Trained These Men

Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

"Before I completed your lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator." HOLLIS F. HAYES, 827 Madison St., Lapeer, Michigan.

Makes $50 a Week

"I am making around $50 a week after all expenses are paid, and I am getting all the Radio work I can take care of, thanks to N. R. I." H. W. SPANGLER, 126½ S. Gay St., Knoxville, Tenn.

$5 to $10 Week in Spare Time

"I am engaged in spare time Radio work. I average from $5 to $10 a week. I often wished that I had enrolled sooner because all this extra money sure does come in handy." THEODORE K. DuBREE, Horsham, Penn.

Here is a quick way to better pay. Radio offers you the opportunity to make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now and to prepare for good full-time Radio jobs paying up to $50 a week. MAIL COUPON. Get my Sample Lesson FREE. Examine it, read it—see how easy it is to understand. See how I train you at home in spare time to be a Radio Operator or Radio Technician.

REAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR BEGINNERS TO LEARN THEN EARN UP TO $50 A WEEK

Broadcasting stations (882 in the U. S.) employ thousands of Radio Technicians with average pay among the country's best paid industries. Repairing, servicing, selling home and auto Radio receivers (there are 50,000,000 in use) gives good jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take advantage of the opportunities to have their own service or retail Radio businesses. Think of the many good-pay jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N. R. I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for those jobs. N. R. I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Yes, Radio Technicians make good money because they use their heads as well as their hands. They must be trained. Mail the COUPON, NOW!

I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TO MAKE $5, $10 A WEEK EXTRA IN SPARE TIME WHILE LEARNING

Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a part time Radio Technician to make good money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get Radio parts and instructions for building test equipment, for conducting experiments that give you valuable, practical experience. You also get a modern Professional Radio Servicing Instrument. My fifty-fifty method—half Radio parts, half Lesson Texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

FIND OUT HOW I TRAIN YOU AT HOME

MAIL THE COUPON. I'll send you a Sample Lesson and my 64-page book FREE. Learn about my Course; the types of jobs in different branches of Radio. Read letters from more than 100 men I have trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste it on a penny postal

J. E. Smith, President, Dept. INS9,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. FIXING RADIO SETS (Lower illustration) pays many Radio Technicians $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week extra in spare time.

Extra Pay in Army, Navy, Too

Every man likely to go into military service, every soldier, sailor, marine, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to 6 times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW!

Mail Coupon Now!

This FREE BOOK has Helped Hundreds of Men to Make More Money

Mr. J. E. Smith, President, Dept. INS9
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington, D. C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, your Sample Lesson and 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No Salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

Address .....

City..... State.....2FR3

THE LATEST AND BEST IN WESTERN FICTION

NEW WESTERN MAGAZINE

10¢

Vol. 4 JANUARY, 1942 No. 2

CONTENTS

A Thrill-Packed Novel of Nester Fighting Men

BARBED WIRE—OR BOOTHILL! ..... Kenneth Fowler 11

How could Jim Antrim win his right to an honest man's brand, and save the lives and homes of his battling nester pards when, wearing a lawman's stolen star, he went on the payroll of the farmers' arch-enemy—the tinhorn king who had murdered his father?

Two Dynamic Frontier Novelettes

HELL ON BEARCAT MOUNTAIN ..... Eli Colter 52

Once a month, regularly, the four tough Jeppson brothers tore the hinges off of Hell. But even this quartet of nail-hard hombres thought twice before going to war against the town of Bearcat Bend—and the curly wolf legion whose hobby was making coffins!

SATAN'S KILLERS RIDE AT NIGHT! ..... John J. Pearsol 76

"Cheat!" his sweetheart sneered; "Rustler!" the cowmen roared; "Killer!" the friends of his youth accused. . . . Yet Lew Barbour knew the whole damned town was wrong—and walked to his death to prove it!

Four Western Short Story Hits

GUN-GHOST FROM JUAREZ ..... Brad Buckner 33

A beaten, battered sucker-bait cowboy vowed he'd square accounts with the longriders of Double T range, so he opened a wipe-out campaign—from a Mexican Boothill grave!

CODE FOR A FRONTIER SAWBONES ..... Max Kesler 42

Wealth, power—and a woman awaited river doctor Jim Dennis, if a careless slip of his scalpel ripped the life from the unconscious man—who was dying so Dennis might live!

WEDDING BELLS AND BULLETS ..... Glen H. Wickman 69

George English didn't think it would take three guns, a ghostly bandit crew, a cow-town mob and two best men to get him married to the sweetest thing in Valley Springs!

MASSACRE AT CEMETERY LANDING ..... James P. Webb 87

Jerry Moran had a job at Bullet River Crossing—if he could take it from six gun-hung devils!

New Western Feature

THE STRAWBOSS ..... The Editor 6

You don't always need gunsmoke for Western drama—as Bat Masterson found out!

ALL STORIES NEW
NO REPRINTS

MARCH ISSUE
PUBLISHED JANUARY 2ND

Published bi-monthly by Fictioneers, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 210 East 43rd Street, New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter January 9, 1941, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright 1941 by Fictioneers, Inc. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them. All rights reserved under Pan American copyright convention. Single copy price 10c. Six issue subscription in the U.S.A. 60c.

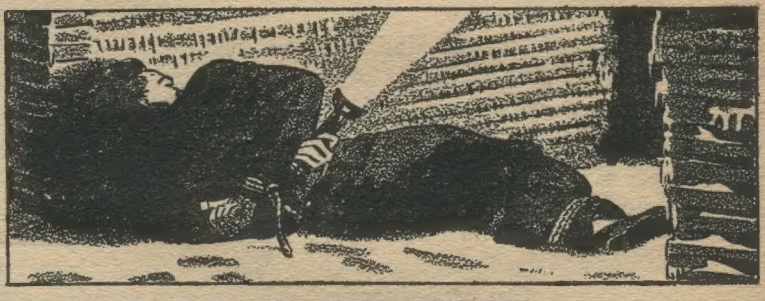
Printed in the U.S.A.

"I WAS BOUND AND GAGGED AND LEFT TO DIE!"

A true experience of JOSEPH J. KARES, *Charlestown, Boston, Mass.*

"THUGS HELD ME UP one bitterly cold night as I left our docked lumber ship," writes Radio Operator Kares. "After taking what cash I had, they left me bound and gagged in an inky dark alley between great piles of stacked lumber.

"FURIOUS STRUGGLING only tightened my bonds. My arms and legs grew numb with cold. My plight was desperate! Then, remembering my flashlight, I managed to reach it . . . started flashing SOS against the top of the lumber.



"FOR MORE THAN AN HOUR I kept signaling. Half dead with cold . . . about to give up hope . . . I was at last rescued by two officers from my ship. If it hadn't been for those dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries I would have been a goner.

(*Signed*) *Joseph J. Kares*"

The word "Eveready" is a registered trade-mark of National Carbon Company, Inc.

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* DATE-LINE

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Unit of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation

UCC

THE STRAWBOSS

NOT so many years ago, when blood-and-thunder dime novels were our chief source of information about the old frontier, Western reading was shallow and repetitious. It was the "another-Indian-bit-the-dust" school of writing, and today it leaves us pretty cold.

There was so much high drama, fast action and excitement for the early chroniclers to set down on paper that they seem to have been content to deal merely with the highlights, with the noisiest, bloodiest episodes from the great saga of the plains. Western writing had to grow up. It had to reach the point where human values, as well as the roar of a six-gun, could be interpreted on Western terms and written into warm, emotional, dramatic fiction of the times.

An incident in the life of Bat Masterson, one of the most colorful characters of the early days, demonstrates the powerful human drama, typically Western yet devoid of popping guns, that flavored the frontier. Usually Bat's name is associated with the violent, robust, wild era of Dodge City, Tombstone and the dozen other high-riding out-trail towns that needed taming. This, like many of the other stories, is a tale of conflict—but it is a conflict within himself primarily, a battle of a man's reckless, young, frontier spirit against the changing times.

For many years Bat had been living at Denver. When President Theodore Roosevelt had offered him the position of United States Marshal for Oklahoma, he declined, explaining, "I have taken my guns off, and I don't ever want to put them on again."

But the excitement and dashing glamor of his younger days still haunted his memories. He was the local authority on the great, stirring legends of the frontier, for he had actually lived through many of them since the Adobe Walls fight. The past, rich and meaty, was with him always—and very possibly some deep inner urge prompted him to try to reclaim some of its heady excitement.

Once, when he was out on one of his occasional sprees, he ran foul of the law. The exact nature of the complaint against him is unknown, but it was sufficiently serious so that the Denver chief of police felt obliged to have Bat arrested. And Bat made it clear that he wouldn't submit to arrest without a fight. The chief knew that if he sent his own men to bring Bat in, two or three of them might be killed.

He prevailed upon Jim Marshall, another old-time peace officer who had proved his courage many a time in dealing with bad actors, to come in from Cripple Creek and perform the unpleasant duty. It was especially unpleasant for Marshall, because there had been a time when he and Bat had fought side by side for twenty-four hours, standing off a siege of Cimarron citizens in the name of the law. Bat was his old gun-partner. But Marshall knew that somebody had to make the arrest, and he consented.

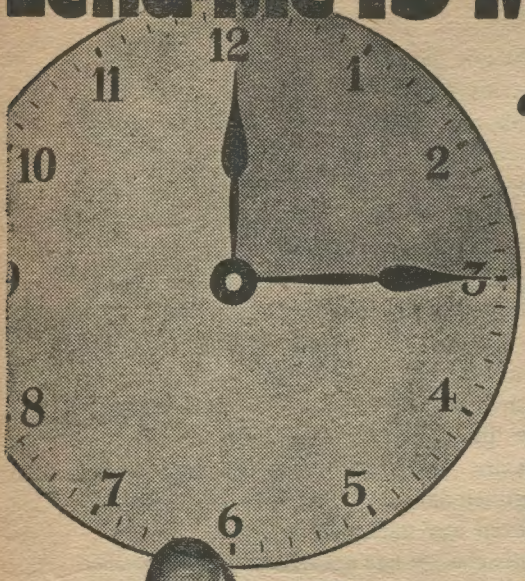
Word got to Bat, somehow, and he telegraphed Marshall that he would be ready and waiting at ten o'clock the next morning, in front of a certain Denver barber shop. Bat's revolver was at his waist, and his right hand rested close to the butt, as he took up his position the next day after his morning shave. He sat outside the barber shop until eleven o'clock. But still no sign of Jim Marshall.

Finally Bat went over to a saloon across the street. The bartender set out his usual morning drink. As Bat lifted the glass, the voice of Jim Marshall sounded at his side: "Sorry I was a little late, Bat."

(Concluded on page 8)

Lend Me 15 Minutes A Day

..and I'll prove I can make you a NEW MAN



I'M "trading-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind," and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making NEW MEN of them.

I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

I Was a 97-lb. Weakling

All the world knows I was ONCE a skinny, scrawny 97-pound weakling. And NOW it knows that I won the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Against all comers! How did I do it? How do I work miracles in the bodies of other men in only 15 minutes a day? The answer is *"Dynamic Tension,"* the amazing method I discovered and which changed me from a 97-pound weakling into the champion you see here!

Here's What Only 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

Are you ALL MAN—tough-muscled, on your toes every minute, with all the up-and-at-'em that can lick your weight in wildcats? Or do you need the help I can give you—the help that has already worked such wonders for other fellows, everywhere?

In just 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home, I'm ready to prove that *"Dynamic Tension"* can lay a new outfit of solid muscle over every inch of your body. Let me put new, smashing power into your arms and shoulders—give you an armor-shield of stomach muscle that laughs at punches—strengthen your legs into real columns of surging stamina. If lack of exercise or wrong living has weakened you inside, I'll get after that condition, too, and show you how it feels to LIVE!

Actual photo of the man who holds the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

Charles Atlas

America's Greatest "Builder of Men"

Among all the physical instructors and "conditioners of men" ONLY ONE NAME STANDS OUT. That name is **Charles Atlas!**

In every part of the country **Charles Atlas** is recognized as "America's Greatest Builder of Men." Almost two million men have written to him. Thousands upon thousands have put their physical development into his capable hands!

And now that the call is for men capable of helping America meet and conquer any national emergency, many thousands of others (even those already in their country's Army and Navy) are calling upon Charles Atlas to build the kind of men America vitally needs.

Here's PROOF Right Here!

"Results come so fast by your method that it seems just as if some magician put on the pounds of solid muscle just where you want them!" —W.L., Missouri

"Feel like a million dollars and have a 44" normal chest—A 2" GAIN IN 4 DAYS!" —L.A.S., Illinois

"My doctor thinks your course is fine. In 15 days have put two inches on my chest and ½ inch on my neck." —B.L., Oregon

"My muscles are bulging out and I feel like a new man. My chest measures 38 in., an increase of 5 in., and my neck increased 2 in." —G.M., Ohio

"Your book opened my eyes . . . 1¼" gain on my biceps and 1" more on my chest in two weeks!" —J.F., Penna.

FREE This Famous Book That Tells You How to Get a Body That Men Respect and Women Admire

Almost two million men have sent for and read my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells you exactly what *"Dynamic Tension"* can do. And it's packed with pictures that SHOW you what it does. Results it has produced for other men. RESULTS I want to prove it can get for YOU! If you are satisfied to take a back seat and be pushed around by other fellows week-in, week-out, you don't want this book. But if you want to learn how you can actually become a NEW MAN, right in the privacy of your own home and in only 15 minutes a day, then man!—get this coupon into the mail to me as fast as your legs can get to the letterbox! CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83M, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83-M,
115 East 23rd St., New York City

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....
(Please Print or Write Plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

(Continued from page 6)

He had entered by a side door. Bat's gun hand was shoulder-high, filled with a glass. Marshall's was dangerously close to his holstered six-shooter.

The ensuing conversation is reported by William MacLeod Raine, a Western historian who found the account in an unpublished manuscript by the Denver district attorney of that time:

"Does this mean a killing, Jim?"

"Depends on whether you are reasonable, Bat."

"Meaning just what?"

"Meaning that it is for you to say."

"What do you mean, reasonable?"

"Denver is too big a town for you to hurrah, Bat. Time for you to move on."

It was more than the gun, so close to Marshall's hand. Dozens of times Bat Masterson had faced greater odds. But always, on his side, he'd had the assurance that he was fighting for what he believed to be right. This time he couldn't have been quite so sure.

For a man of his reputation, it would be humiliating to back down. But what Marshall said was true: Denver was a city now, with law and order to be maintained. The frontier days, when a man with a gun could get by with defying the law, were past. The reckless, free and easy, wild and wooly years were no more than memories. It was his own fault that he now stood here, gun hand in the air, with his old friend, Jim Marshall, telling him to get out of town.

"How soon?" he asked. There was no talk of arrest between these two pioneers who had fought shoulder to shoulder one day in the Cimarron courthouse. When Marshall suggested the four o'clock train, Bat nodded. The matter was settled.

Bat got his things in order and caught that train. Marshall, meanwhile, made the rounds of the newspaper offices, to make sure that none of them printed an account of the incident. These modern folks might not understand about such things, and one old-timer had the reputation of another to protect. For times had changed, and both of them had found it out that day.

Perhaps that meeting in the Denver saloon was the hardest fight Bat Masterson ever had. But it would have had no place in a blood-and-thunder Western magazine of fifteen or twenty years ago. No gunsmoke, no blood-drenched corpse, not even any galloping hoofs.

This change has made possible the well-rounded *new* type of Western stories that gave this magazine its name. Our writers know that NEW WESTERN is not interested in bang-bang stories of gun-dummy action. Sixguns had their place in the West—as they have in the fiction of this magazine—but a no more important place than the courage and friendship of two strong men, or the heroic sacrifice of a doomed granger, or the blind faith of a woman. And many times, we have found, off-trail stories of such homely human virtues breathe even more dramatic fire, than the rip-roaring, too-often meaningless adventure of high-riding two-gun buscaderoes.

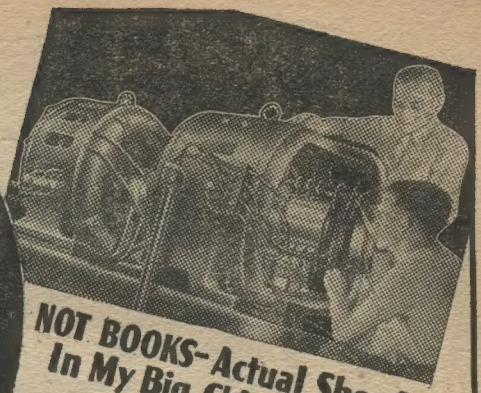
Variety is our watchword, and in the pages that follow we have attempted to give a true cross-section, in fiction, of the West as it really was—with meat flavored for every palate.

THE EDITOR

TRAIN FOR ELECTRICITY

I'll Finance Your Training

H. C. Lewis



NOT BOOKS—Actual Shop Work In My Big Chicago Shops

"LEARN BY DOING" IN 90 DAYS

PREPARE FOR JOBS LIKE THESE
Armature Winder
Sub-Station Operator
Auto & Aviation Ignition
Maintenance Electrician
Service Station Owner
Air Conditioning
Radio Servicing
and many others
Our Employment Bureau for graduates gives FREE lifetime employment service.

Have you ever dreamed of holding down **a steady, good pay job?** Have you ever dreamed of doing the work you really like in a job that holds promise of a **real future** in the years ahead?

Well, we all know that you can't get the good things in life by just **dreaming** about them. Hundreds of fellows are today holding down mighty fine jobs with prospects of a bright future. They are filling these jobs because they had the foresight to equip themselves with the **right kind of training.** Most of these men were only average fellows a short time ago, but the proper training helped to lift them out of the low pay ranks of unskilled workers. The same opportunity is now offered to **you.**

The great fascinating field of **ELECTRICITY** offers a real future to many men and young men who are willing to prepare for a place in this giant industry.

Here at my school in Chicago, the **world's Electrical Center,** you can get **12 weeks Shop Training** in **ELECTRICITY** and **an extra 4 weeks Course in Radio** that can prepare you for a good pay job in these fields.

You will be trained on actual equipment and machinery and because of our method of training, you **don't need previous experience or a lot of education.** Many of my successful graduates never even completed Grammar School.

Here in my school you work on generators, motors, dynamos, you do house wiring, wind armatures and do actual work in many other branches of Electricity and right now I'm including valuable instruction in **Diesel, Electric Refrigeration** and **Air Conditioning** at **no extra cost.** Our practical shop methods make it **easier to learn—First** the instructors tell you **how** a thing should be done—**then** they **show** you how it should be done—**then you do the actual work yourself.**

AN EXTRA 4 WEEKS COURSE IN RADIO INCLUDED

H. C. Lewis

I think the "pay after graduation" plan . . . offers the fellow who wants to get ahead in life a wonderful opportunity . . . I am now employed by the—— Power Co. I have been employed by this Company ever since graduating from COYNE . . . I make almost double what I did at my previous work . . . COYNE School helped me in landing the job I now have.—James Dible.

GET YOUR TRAINING NOW—PAY FOR IT LATER

You can get this training **first**—then **pay for it later in easy monthly payments,** starting **60 days** after your 90 days training period is over—**then you have 12 months** to complete your payments.

EARN WHILE LEARNING

If you need **part time work** to help out with expenses while training in my shops, my employment department will give you their assistance to help you get it. Then after graduation this department will give you valuable **lifetime employment service.**

Send the coupon today for all details. When I get it I'll send you my big free book containing dozens of pictures of students at work in my shops. I'll also tell you about my **"Pay After Graduation" Plan,** extra 4 weeks Radio Course and how many **earn while learning** and how we help **our students after graduation.** Fill in, clip coupon, **mail today for your start toward a brighter future.**

MAIL COUPON TODAY FOR BIG FREE BOOK

H. C. LEWIS, President
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 91-76, Chicago

H. C. LEWIS, President,
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL,
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 91-76, Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir: Please send me free your big catalog and full particulars of your present offer, also your "Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan and also your **extra 4 weeks Radio Course,** you are including at no extra cost.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

THE "GREAT REPUBLIC"... 4,555 tons...the largest ship in the world in 1853! Captains of ships like this often carried kegs of whiskey on every voyage. They knew the billowing ocean "rocked" whiskey to smoother flavor.

Old Mr. Boston says:

"From Sea-Rocked whiskeys of Old came my inspiration for Rocking Chair!"

BACK HOME IN PORT, these seafaring men still "rocked the keg" under porch rockers. Down Cape Cod way, Mr. Boston heard tales of these grand old "rocked" whiskeys . . . got the idea for mellow, richer Rocking Chair!

TODAY—YOU'LL DISCOVER in Rocking Chair a smoothness worthy of the finest wave-rocked whiskeys of old! Because Old Mr. Boston recaptures that flavor by *controlled agitation in his special blending process.*

MR. BOSTON

ROCKING CHAIR

BLENDED WHISKEY

85 Proof • 75% Grain Neutral Spirits • Ben-Burk, Inc., Boston, Mass.

A hard-punching novel of a last-ditch battle between nesters and a tinhorn cattle tyrant

By KENNETH FOWLER

Barbed Wire—or Boothill!

The ghost of his strangled nester father decreed Jim Antrim leave his far-flung owlhoot outpost and fight a gambler king's murder-mad crew until the victorious day when farmers' big-wheeled wagons rolled over prairies drenched with the blood of men who had died for Western freedom!

CHAPTER ONE

Murder Trail

AN ELECTRIC warning tingled along Jim Antrim's nerves as he looked up suddenly and caught the eyes of the man across the aisle studying him furtively.

He had had a disturbed feeling of being watched by this man, soon after boarding the train at Fort Plain, but had tried, then, to tell himself that it couldn't be, that the possibility of recognition was too remote. But was it? And suppose his impression was correct—suppose the man really was watching him?

He kept his expression impassive as he dipped into the pocket of his coat and drew out the letter that was his reason for being here and running this risk. He already knew its somber message by heart; but now, seeking to cloak his suspicion of the man opposite, he again took it out of the envelope and forced his attention on it.

The sprawled script had an illegible appearance at first glimpse; but to Jim Antrim the words stood out blackly and unforgettably against the clean whiteness of the paper. He read quickly past the opening, the part where old Halliday had tried to prepare him for the shock, and then came to the following lines:

> He was lyin' in the bunk, Jim, and this maguay was knotted around his throat and then tied to a nail up over his head. I guess he died quick, from the look of it.
>
> I got no proof, Jim, and neither has any of the other homesteaders, but we got our suspicions that Cray Randall was in back of this. Your father'd been fightin' Randall tooth and nail, and the last straw come a couple weeks ago when we strung up our new line of wire south of the town.
>
> Randall claimed it'd kill the town; that

with no more trail herds comin' through, business'd go plumb to pot.

Your father come back by sayin' the more businesses like Randall's that went to pot, the better it'd be for Trails City. And then speakin' as head of the Homesteaders' Association he give Randall straight-out warnin' to keep his hands off that fence. Well, sir, it wasn't no more'n a couple days later we found him with that maguay cinched around his neck.

Been a rumor floatin' around here that Randall wants to get rid of Ted Elser and bring in one of them gun rep marshals from out of town. Hell's fixin' to bust loose.

Hope I will be seein' you soon, Jim. Eight years is a long time, but reckon I'd still be able to reckanize any kin of Adam Antrim.

Resp'fully,
MATT HALLIDAY.

Misery gnawed through Jim as he returned the letter to his pocket. His mind shaped a picture of Adam Antrim as he had seen him last; gaunt from his work at the plow and with that indefinable sadness in his eyes for hopes unrealized. And now. . . .

Suddenly Jim looked up again and caught the glance of the passenger across the aisle. He was being watched, all right. And he'd have to do something about it—pronto.

He glanced out through the car's soot-streaked window. The train was moving

rapidly along a level stretch of prairie, traveling too fast at the moment to permit a safe jump. But in ten minutes they should be hitting the grade at Cannonball Mountain, and there the engineer would have to crowd his boilers to build up even moderate headway.

A red haze swam up before him, and Randall was only a blur in front of his eyes.

Jim's thoughts turned bitter suddenly. Was it always going to be like this? Was he always going to be leaping from every shadow that crossed his path, was he going to go on living in this perpetual fear and uncertainty for the rest of his life? His mind raced back over the eight years since he had been away, years of unceasing saddle tramping, of moving on from one job to another without ever daring to remain longer than a month or two in any one place—incessantly on the run.

He had a sudden poignant remembrance of his mother's death, of his father's grim but inadequate resistance to the poverty that had been threatening to engulf them. And he was hearing his father's bitter and hopeless words again:

"It's no use, son. Ain't nobody gonna give a job to no seventeen-year-old boy when there's men to be had. Anyway, you couldn't earn enough if you did git a

job. It'd take six hundred dollars to buy the seed and tools we need to git us out of this tight."

* * *

HE REMEMBERED the sinking feeling that had come to him when his father had mentioned this impossible sum, but he'd had too much of the Antrim doggedness in him to back down then.

He'd wasted a month after that, trying to get work, trying to prove his father wrong. But Adam Antrim had been right. Nobody wanted a boy of seventeen—nobody but the Harlo brothers. And the Harlos were wanted by every lawman in Nebraska.

He'd sent his old man the six hundred after the stage holdup; but by then, ironically, he was in no position to go back and help with the farming. He was a fugitive, with a bounty of five hundred dollars on his head.

He'd told the Harlos he was Luke Mason, so that was the name the law had put on the reward dodgers above his picture, after Len Harlo had been captured and induced to talk. The picture had been in a silver locket that had been his mother's, a tintype she'd had taken just before he'd become seventeen. He hadn't missed it until one day when he'd come upon his own likeness staring at him from a reward notice. Then he realized he must have dropped the locket at the scene of the holdup.

He turned now, and suddenly renewed his attention on the man across the aisle. If the hombre was a lawman he certainly wasn't advertising the fact. The Colt holstered at his belt had a used look, but there was no sign of a badge or any other insignia of authority.

Jim's glance went to the square-shaped face, assessing the thin, humorless mouth, the cold, close-set blue eyes. The man wasn't tall, yet he evidently wished to convey the impression of tallness, for he sat rigidly straight in his seat and his boot heels had been built up higher than ordinary.

He had given Jim a single cool glance as Jim looked his way and then turned to stare with apparent disinterest out the window. But this indifference seemed a little too elaborate after his earlier sharp watchfulness; a jot overdone.

Jim could tell from the way the engine was beginning to labor that they had reached the preliminary grade at Cannonball Mountain, and he was now confirmed in his decision to jump from the train.

His casualness was equal to that of the man opposite, as he reached up to the rack above his head and took down his warbag. He opened it, took out the extra sack of Bull he had in it, and deliberated a moment over the rolling of a cigarette. After that, with the cigarette pinched between his lips, he rose and ostentatiously returned the bag to the rack. Then he had backed out from the seat and was moving at a casual saunter towards the rear of the coach.

Would the man follow him? Or would he be deceived because the warbag was being left back there on the luggage rack? Jim felt a sharpened tension as he reached the end of the coach and glanced over his shoulder. The man sat looking out the window, apparently interested now only in the scenery.

Jim's hand hesitated on the door leading into the last coach. Perhaps, like a fool, he was letting himself be spooked over nothing. But anything would be better than this uncertainty. Grimly, he opened the door and passed into the next coach.

This one was divided, half passenger coach, half baggage car. There was nobody in it but a brakeman sprawled in sleep on one of the faded plush seats, and one lone passenger reading a magazine.

Jim went on quietly to the door of the baggage section and opened it. The brakeman was also apparently the baggageman, for there was no one here, just miscellaneous stacks of boxes and luggage piled up haphazardly about the narrow compartment. Jim walked among them and through to the rear platform.

The train had momentarily picked up speed again, but in another few minutes they'd be starting the long pull up the mountain itself, and he'd be able to drop off in comparative safety.

He tried now to light the cigarette that still dangled from his mouth, but the gusty back-draft swirling up from the rear trucks twice snuffed out his match. He stepped back into the baggage compartment. Striking another match, he was stooped a little forward over the flame when a voice at his elbow jerked him taut.

"All right, Mason!" it commanded. "Just keep your hands up and don't move!"

CHAPTER TWO

Hell On Wheels

JIM forced himself to light the cigarette before looking up. Then, without surprise, he saw the man who had been seated opposite him in the coach ahead. The gun in the gent's hand was pointed steadily at him.

The man said. "You shouldn't've took makin's from the warbag when you had that other sack of Bull stickin' right out of your pocket. Was a dead give-away."

Jim cursed under his breath, but for the other's benefit shrugged. "No law against a man changin' his brand of tobacco, is there?"

"None I know of," the man acknowledged with dry irony. "But there is one against holdin' up stages."

Jim sucked in a sharp breath. "I don't know what you're talkin' about."

"Yes you do, Mason. Once I see a face, I don't forget it. My business not to." He stepped forward as he spoke and, balancing charily on his absurd heels, yanked Jim's Colt from its holster. He flung it behind him without taking his eyes from Jim's.

"Guess you don't want no trouble," he suggested, and reached around to his left rear pocket. "Just put out your hands, and we won't have none."

Panic stiffened Jim as he caught the sharp glitter of the handcuffs. He tried to think of something to do, anything; but for a paralyzing moment his brain seemed incapable of thought.

Then a screeching sound filled his ears; was like an abrupt concussion releasing the pressure against his brain. His mind cleared with the realization that, two cars ahead, the first coach was taking the sharp turn at the bottom of Cannonball Mountain. Hope flashed to him with the thought. This was the end car, it would take a sharper swing than the others. There was just a chance. . . .

He braced himself and held out his hands. "Can't auger with a Colt," he said shortly.

Another of Kenneth Fowler's great novels of the plains appears in December BIG-BOOK WESTERN! Be sure to get a copy today—and read "The Fight for Purgatory Dam," a book-length epic of a lone-wolf Western fighting-man who didn't know when he was licked!

The man with the gun began, "Figured you'd be sensi—" That was as far as he got. The car hit the curve and for an instant he was thrown off balance. In that instant Jim leaped at him and struck him a terrific blow on the jaw.

The man's head snapped back and the gun flew out of his hand. He had no time to recover. Jim slammed a fist into his belly and, as he doubled over, drove his head back with a punch that shook his whole body. The man went down and Jim bent over him.

The handcuffs lay within arm's reach and Jim picked them up and quickly snapped them on the lawman's wrists. Then taking a grip on his victim's belt, he dragged him across the floor and pulled him into a niche between two piled-up mounds of baggage.

A few feet away a new plow wrapped with a tarp caught Jim's attention. He went over and cut away the rope from the tarp, then came back and started binding the man's legs with it. He was just finishing when the victim's eyes blinked open and fixed him with a dazed stare.

"Next time you're feelin' tough, *amigo,*" Jim said, "you better put some lead in them high heels of yours. Might help weight you down a little."

Awareness flooded slowly into the man's eyes. He gave Jim a steady, bleak stare. "Friend, the next time you and I meet I won't be puttin' my extra lead in boot heels."

Jim regarded him imperturbably. "If you mean you'll be puttin' it in me," he suggested dryly, "thanks just the same, but I don't think we'll be meetin' again."

He pulled a bandanna out of his pocket and, gripping it firmly between his hands, ripped it cleanly down the middle. Then with a few deft motions he had a gag fitted over the man's mouth with one of the halves, and had it bound tightly into place with the other.

The man glared at him in impotent fury. But Jim was bent down now and searching swiftly through his prisoner's pockets.

Pants and vest revealed nothing of special interest, but in the inside pocket of the coat Jim found a wallet, and in the wallet, a letter. His breath caught as his eyes stopped on the name written across the envelope. Lew Shotten. Shotten, notorious gun marshal of Ute Springs! *And the postmark on the envelope was Trails City!*

A sharp foreboding stabbed Jim as he recalled Matt Halliday's words concerning an out-of-town marshal. Then he had the letter out of the envelope and was tensely reading:

> Friend Shotten:
>
> Glad you can make it. I promise this will be plenty worth your while, but keep everything under your hat till you see me. This town is a hot-bed right now, and I don't want the homestead gang to savvy what's going on till I'm ready to announce it myself.
>
> Will be seeing you at the station, but better bring this letter with you for identification. We haven't met before, and I don't want to take any chances in this.
>
> Yours,
> CRAY RANDALL.

Shock held Jim rigid; then a hot wave of anger swept him. Cray Randall! A saloon-keeper, elected mayor by virtue of a powerful red-light district, was bringing in a professional killer to keep the town safe for the gamblers and honkatonk owners and fancy women.

Suddenly, Jim thought of the kind of men Shotten would have as deputies: brutal gunmen masked as peace officers. Against such men the homesteaders wouldn't have a chance in a thousand of saving their fence. They'd have very little chance of even saving themselves, if they tried to block Randall.

Jim's jaw clamped as he thought of Adam Antrim. It looked now as if Matt Halliday had been right in suspecting Randall. But what could he do about it,

now? He'd already been recognized by this man Shotten; he'd be in renewed danger of recognition the instant he stepped off the train. Unless. . . .

A startling thought struck him, and suddenly he bent over Shotten and pulled back the lapel of the marshal's coat. There it was: Shotten's star as peace officer of Ute Springs. And already he had this letter—the letter Cray Randall was supposed to be shown as a means of identifying Shotten.

Suppose he took this badge and the letter. Posing as Shotten, wouldn't he have an inside track for getting information about the murderer of his father? And this train that shuttled between Fort Plain and Singleton only made the run once a day; that would give him twenty-four hours to work in.

Jim stared down thoughtfully at the trussed-up figure of the marshal. The train would be pulling into Trails City in just fifteen minutes . . . and what did he have to lose? Abruptly reaching his decision, he dragged Shotten deeper into the niche between the piles of baggage and covered him with the tarpaulin he had cut away from the plow. He turned, then, and made his way back to the door leading into the passenger compartment. Opening it cautiously, he peered out.

The brakeman was still dozing, but the passenger who had been reading had put his magazine away and now gave Jim a casual attention as he passed through the car. He reached his own seat in the car ahead and sat down tensely. In fifteen minutes, he thought; in just fifteen minutes. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Substitute Gun-Slick

LEW SHOTTEN'S badge was pinned to Jim Antrim's vest-front as the train began to slow for Trails City. He looked out with a remembering nostalgia upon the town's dingy outer precincts.

He glanced apprehensively back over his shoulder as he reached up for his warbag, but there was nobody in the car but the two whisky drummers and the woman with the baby who had been passengers since Ogalalla.

Jim breathed out his relief at not seeing Shotten in the doorway, with a gun pointed at him. For the last quarter-hour he had been in a fever of suspense at fear of Shotten being discovered and released. Now it looked as if he could be sure of twenty-four hours, at least—unless Shotten should be discovered before the train got to Singleton. But would twenty-four hours be time enough for all he had to do?

The train was in now, and with the warbag held out in front of him Jim picked his way down the narrow aisle after the two whisky drummers. At the platform he paused briefly to stare at the dark, spotlessly groomed individual who was moving out from the crowd at the station and walking toward him interrogatively.

Jim stepped down from the train, keeping his glance on this man, whose fresh, pomaded appearance gave him the look of having just stepped out of a barber shop.

The man came over and halted, his eyes fastened expressionlessly on the badge at the top of Jim's vest. "Shotten?"

Jim brought out the purloined letter and the man glanced at it and handed it back.

"I'm Randall," he said. "Gig's right here at the corner. I'll drive you over to my place."

Jim said, "Maybe you'd better drop me at the hotel first so I can wash some of this train dirt out of my ears."

"Suit yourself." Randall shrugged.

"But the sooner we get things settled, the better. There isn't much time to waste."

A bright new buggy with red spokes stood waiting at the station's hitchrail. Jim started toward it after Randall. He didn't notice the man and the girl until he was almost up to them, and then they stepped in between him and Randall and the man said, "We'd like to talk to you a minute before you get into that buggy."

Before Jim could speak Randall whirled and snapped, "Stay out of this, Boyett!" He turned to Jim. "Come on, don't pay any attention to these two."

But Jim's glance was on the girl, and something in her way of looking at him made him pause.

He said, "What was it you wanted?" and was conscious suddenly that she was very lovely, and that it was a certain grave attention in her eyes that had made him speak.

"Your name is Shotten, isn't it?" she said in a quiet voice.

Jim stiffened, staring at her in surprise. "Why, yes. But how did you know—"

"Mr. Shotten, please go away from here."

Jim stared at her blankly; then Randall's angry exclamation aroused him. "I tell you the hell with these people, Shotten! Come on, let's get out of here."

Jim's glance swung irresolutely from the girl back to Randall. Then, as he started for the buggy, she reached out and plucked at his sleeve.

"Please!" she pleaded. "It will only take you a minute to listen to us."

With an effort, Jim hardened himself. "You'll have to make it fast, ma'am."

She looked at him steadily. "You don't look like a gunman," she said. "But the talk is that you're here to hire out to Cray Randall—that you're intending to help him keep the trails open to the riffraff that come in here and make this a town where decent women are afraid to live!"

Jim flushed. "Well, ma'am?"

"Will you please go back where you came from!" the girl cried passionately. "In the name of common decency, will you go back before any more blood is shed and any more people have been murdered!"

Jim had a paralyzed feeling of being rooted where he stood, of being unable either to move or speak. From the buggy seat, Randall's voice jarred him with its coldly curbed virulence.

"Looks like that's the end of the speech, Shotten. Now will you come on before she starts waving a flag?"

Jim gave him a curt glance and then swung his gaze reluctantly back to the girl.

"I'm sorry," he said to her, "but there's nothing I can do for you."

"Nothing you can do!" She gave him a long and bitter stare as the man at her side broke in, "Oh come on, Judith, I told you this wouldn't be any use! Let's shag out of here and get away from the skunk smell!"

The girl turned, and as she did Jim caught the look of utter abhorrence she flung at him. He climbed abruptly into the buggy beside Cray Randall.

"Let's get started," he snapped.

* * *

A GRIN loosened Randall's tight mouth. "Pretty girl," he murmured. "Tough luck her brother Johnny's so hot-tempered." He flicked the whip at the gelding, and the buggy wheeled out from the hitchrack. "Afraid it's going to get him into an accident some time," he added in an insinuating voice.

Jim stared at the saloon owner bluntly. "Boyett one of the ring-leaders?"

"Him and Matt Halliday."

Jim started. "Matt Halliday, you said?"

Randall blandly swore to himself. "I keep forgetting you don't know any of

these people. Halliday's an old hay-shoveler who's got the homesteaders so stirred up they're like a swarm of hornets. But we don't figure on much trouble from him—after today."

Jim sucked in a breath. "You mean you want me to look up this Halliday?"

"No, I've got a man taking care of Halliday. But don't worry; there'll be plenty for you to do without that."

Shock froze Jim, and for a moment he couldn't speak. Then he realized that Randall was staring at him strangely.

"What's the matter?" the saloon owner demanded suspiciously. "You know Halliday?"

"Huh! Oh, Halliday." Jim shook his head. "Nope, never heard of the gent. Guess I was thinkin' of somethin' else."

"While you're working for me," Randall said brusquely, "it will pay you just to think about my business." He reined up in front of the hotel. As Jim got down he said in a different tone, "Well, see you in a little while," and then was moving away, upstreet toward his Pride of the Trail Saloon, two blocks farther on.

Jim stood looking somberly after him a moment before turning and crossing the board walk to the steps of the McSorley House. At the desk he registered as "Lew Shotten, Ute Springs," and the clerk gave the signature a respectful interest as he handed him a key. "B-17, Mr. Shotten. Second floor, and turn right."

He climbed a flight of worn, uncarpeted stairs and then started down a dim and narrow hallway in which an odor of stale cooking still lingered damply. He found the door with his number on it and was inserting the key in the lock when a finger touched his arm and a low voice said, "Howdy, Jim! Remember me?"

Jim turned abruptly, hand to hip.

"Easy, son." The old-timer who stood looking him up and down tensely had a stringy gray mustache and steady, piercing blue eyes.

Jim breathed, "Matt Halliday!" and the old man grabbed his arm and glanced apprehensively up and down the shadowed hallway.

"Not so loud!" he whispered. "Git inside, where there can't nobody hear us."

They went into the room, a small chamber with a bed, wash-stand and one straight-backed chair. An open window, with the shade half drawn, gave out upon a narrow second-floor gallery that ran completely around the hotel.

Jim turned and stared blankly at Matt Halliday. The old man was down on his hands and knees, peering under the bed. He jumped up and went to the window and looked out; then, before Jim could utter a word, he had crossed to the right of the room and yanked open a closet door. The closet was empty.

After this he turned back to Jim and sat down tensely on the edge of the bed. "Now, tell me what in tarnation thunder you were doin' down there at the station this mornin' with Cray Randall," he demanded abruptly.

Jim grinned at the old man's vehemence. "There's quite a story to that," he said, and then pulled out the chair from beside the washstand and sat down in it. He watched the eager brightening of Matt Halliday's eyes as he got into his recital of occurrences that morning upon the train; and when he was finished the old man exultantly whacked his knee and exclaimed, "By grab, we got 'em! We got Randall an' his hull gang, if we play our cards right!"

* * *

INSTANTLY his face clouded. "Worst of it is, I can't be seen talkin' to you. And Randall's got Joe Breeder on my trail." He shook his head, and an expression of despondency filtered into his eyes. "Ain't as fast on a gun-pull as I was once," he finished gloomily.

"Shucks," Jim encouraged him, "you're safe enough as long as you don't show 'em your back. Buzzards like that don't shoot a man from the front." He leaned over, pulling up his chair closer to the old man. "Tell me about dad, Matt," he said simply.

A pained look came into Matt Halliday's eyes. "Ain't much to tell yuh, son, above what I said in my letter." He hesitated. "Guess I did fergit to mention about the money, though." And he looked at Jim reluctantly.

"The money? What money, Matt?"

"That six hundred you sent on to yore dad by Archie Felton. You know, the dinero you wanted him to turn back to the express company. You was afraid—"

"I know, I know," Jim interrupted impatiently, "I was afraid it might be traced back to me if I mailed it myself. But what about it, Matt—didn't dad do as I wanted? Didn't he—"

"He would've, son, if he hadn't been murdered—and the money hadn't been stole."

Jim felt a sinking despair. Why had this had to happen, on top of everything else? He'd worked and sweated eight years to scrape that money together. Eight years . . . and now, for what?

He stared away from Matt Halliday unseeingly. "Well, reckon that's the straw that breaks the camel's back," he muttered bitterly, at last. "I figured if I paid that money back the express company might help to clear me with the law. But now—" He shrugged and turned his gaze down hopelessly to the floor.

Matt Halliday said, his voice gentle, "Now don't be takin' it like that, son. Whoever murdered yore dad has got that six hundred. And if it was Randall, or one of Randall's men, ten dollars to a fried cake the dinero's cached right now in the safe over in Randall's office."

New hope gleamed in Jim's eyes as he straightened suddenly. "By Godfrey, maybe you're right! And if I can figure some way to get Randall to open that safe—if the money should still be in that little red cardboard box that I—"

He stopped and tensed abruptly as he saw Halliday jerk around and stare toward the half-opened window. "Thought I heard a step," the old man whispered tautly. "Should'a' thought before to draw down that damned winda shade." As he spoke, he rose and tiptoed cautiously across to the window.

Jim saw the gnarled hand reach up. And at the same instant a shot crashed. With frozen horror, Jim watched the old man reel back, caught a blurred glimpse of his pain-twisted face as he went down.

His own gun flashed into his hand as he sprang across the room and recklessly plunged his head out through the opened window. A man was running down the narrow gallery towards a rear flight of stairs. He was almost up to them as Jim took deliberate aim and fired.

The man halted as suddenly as if a loop had caught him and jerked him back. The gun was a silver pinwheel spinning out of his hand as he took a single stumbling step forward and then tilted and pitched sickeningly down the stairs.

Jim slammed the window shut and yanked down the shade. Matt Halliday lay sprawled on the floor. Jim's heart thudded jerkily as he bent over and rested his ear against the old man's chest. Halliday was dead!

Jim sprang up as a sound of hoarse shouts came from below, then a scuffling pound of feet. He couldn't let them find Matt's body here! If they ever did—

He crossed swiftly to the door and pulled it open a crack. All the movement was still from below stairs; for the moment at least they would be engaged about the body of Matt's murderer. Maybe, if he worked fast. . . .

The hallway was deserted as he started down it, dragging the dead body of his friend behind him. He tried three doors before he found the fourth unlocked and cautiously entered an empty room. He dragged his grim burden across the room and quickly threw open the window.

About to leave, a new thought struck him. To make it look as if Matt had fired the shot that had killed that sidewinder downstairs, he'd ought to swap guns with the old man. He started to stoop over the body and then straightened suddenly. There was a sound of footsteps coming up the stairs! He'd have to leave things as they were and get out of here while he still had the chance!

He cat-footed to the door, got it open and then shut behind him just as two men reached the top of the stairs and stood eyeing him suspiciously.

"Hear anything of a shot from up this way?" one demanded.

"Sure, I heard it," Jim said. "But it sounded more out back to me. I was just goin' out for a look-see."

With relief, he watched the men swing around and go back down the stairs. But he couldn't risk another trip to that room now. He followed slowly after the two men, and a moment later was grimly moving down the hotel's front steps. It was time he had a little talk with Cray Randall; it was time he found out how Randall intended to utilize the services of the marshal of Ute Springs!

CHAPTER FOUR

Gun Trap!

JIM ANTRIM'S thoughts were in a dizzy whirl as he moved away from the hotel and started slowly up Main Street. It seemed impossible that not more than ten minutes ago he had sat in a

You rate high, mister, in her book
If you've a smooth and well-groomed look!
With thrifty Thin Gillettes it's easy
To get shaves that are clean and breezy!
Outlast Ordinary Blades
Two To One
THIN
Gillette
Produced By The
Maker Of The Famous
Gillette Blue Blade
4 for 10c
Save Extra Money! Get The Big New Economy Package, 12 For 27c

gig beside Cray Randall and heard Randall calmly predict this very thing that had happened. Matt Halliday, dead. His father's trusted and loyal old friend, *his* only friend in this strangely changed town. And Matt had been shot dead before his very eyes!

In his abstraction, he hadn't noticed the buckboard drawn up in front of the Bon Ton Store until he was within just a few yards of it. And then he looked up and saw Judith and Johnny Boyett. Sudden new hope filled him. Now he could put himself right with this girl, could wipe out the memory of that look of loathing she had given him back at the station when he had been with Randall. And for some reason he wanted her good opinion; for some reason the beauty of her dark hair and dark, grave eyes had remained persistently and disquietingly in his thoughts.

She was gathering up her skirts to step into the buckboard as he called, "Oh, Miss Boyett!" and he saw her turn and look at him with her hand still clinging to the seat arm.

In the same instant her glance went cold and she stepped up deliberately to the seat. "Drive on, Johnny," she said firmly to her brother.

"But I've got to talk to you, Miss Boyett!" Jim cried. "You've got to listen to me! I—"

She kept her gaze disdainfully forward as Johnny flicked his whip at the gray. "She's not interested, Shotten," Johnny called back, and then the buckboard had turned and was going away down the street.

Jim stood staring after it with a look of helpless fury. Then, wheeling angrily, he started on again toward the Pride of the Trail.

He found Cray Randall in his private office in the rear of the saloon, apparently waiting for him. The saloon owner motioned him to a chair, then pushed a box of cigars across the desk toward him.

Jim shook his head. "Just smoke a cigarette, if you don't mind."

Randall shrugged as he selected a perfecto from the box and attentively lighted it. He relished the first few puffs before putting his glance back on Jim Antrim.

"Lew," he began abruptly, "I want some wire cut, and I want you to see that my men aren't interfered with while they're doing the job."

Jim flicked his tongue across the cigarette he had rolled. "Where's this wire at?"

"South of the town. The damned homesteaders have got the trail blocked with it—can't a single trail herd get through." Randall took a jerky puff on the cigar. "Right this minute there's a couple of big drives stalled below the town, waitin' to get in. If I don't get that wire cut in another twenty-four hours, those drives are going to swing around us and head for the next nearest loading point. And that's Piñon Plains—fifty miles to the north of here."

"And if they have to do that," Jim murmured, "and the word spreads around that Trails City is closed, it means the end—for you and your kind."

"I don't exactly like the way you put it, but that's about the size of it."

"So where do I come in?" Jim prompted.

Randall took a deep pull on the cigar and leaned forward with his hand flattened across his knee. "You'll be there when that wire's being cut—tonight, There may be trouble. If there is, you'll put a stop to it—as marshal."

"I see. I arrest the homesteaders for starting a disturbance."

"I don't know as I'd say *arrest*, Marshal," Randall drawled.

Jim squinted across the lighted tip of his cigarette. "And as a practical man, what's in this for me?"

"Five thousand dollars. And a permanent job here as marshal."

* * *

JIM'S glance ran over to the safe in the far corner of the room. He appeared to consider a moment. "Okay," he agreed, finally. "Give me a five hundred advance, and we'll call it a deal."

He felt Randall's dark eyes probing him. "You're a tough man, Lew."

"And you're a smart one to know when to hire a tough one."

Randall laughed. "Okay! But the flattery didn't get you this, remember." Rising, he crossed to the safe and was busy a moment over the combination. He swung the heavy door open and thrust his hand inside. Then Jim saw the box—*a red cardboard box!*

But was it the same one? If it didn't have that zigzag mark across the top of it, it wasn't. And he couldn't see the top because of the box of stationery that was piled on top of it.

For a moment of angry confusion, he hesitated. Then Randall had shut the safe and was coming toward him carrying a thick manila envelope. He could get the drop on Randall; force him to open the safe again. But if Randall resisted, if he had to shoot, he would be trapped here. A noon-day crowd had been swarming at the bar when he had come in. There were sure to be plenty of Randall's henchmen mixed in with it. He'd have to wait till later, wait till he could get Randall alone. Then. . . .

Randall had finished counting out five hundred dollars from the manila envelope and was pushing the money across the desk toward him.

"That's it," he said. "Now wait here a minute," and went out of the room.

He returned in a moment with two men. "Lew," he said, "meet Seco Smith and Mike Carrigan—couple of the boys who'll be working with you. Lew Shotten, boys."

Jim shook hands with Smith, a gaunt, surly-looking personage, then with Carrigan, a big man with blunt, stabbing eyes.

"Howdy," he said, and was conscious of Carrigan's keen glance flicking over him.

"Always thought Shotten was a little jasper," Carrigan remarked.

Randall was back at the desk. He glanced up irritably. "Damn it, Mike, you're not trying to tell me this isn't Lew Shotten, I hope!"

"No, but—"

"Then listen to what I've got to say and quit beefing!" Randall nodded curtly towards Jim Antrim. "Lew, here, is taking over Ted Elser's old job. You two know what you're to do tonight. You'll meet here at nine o'clock and pick up Shotten. If there's trouble, Shotten'll take steps to enforce the peace—and you can go right on with your job."

"There'll be trouble, all right," Seco Smith growled. "Them hombres have had guards ridin' that fence line for the last couple of days. Ed Palmer and Charlie Goodyear ride it days, and Johnny Boyett and Land Hulberg nights."

"You won't have anything to worry about with Shotten to back your play." Randall dipped into his velvet smoking jacket. He took out a silver star and sent it spinning across the desk top.

"Just to make it official," he said to Jim Antrim. . . .

Later, having his dinner at the McSorley House, Jim Antrim was conscious of an increasing uneasiness. Suppose Shotten—the real Lew Shotten—got back sooner than he had thought he could, and exposed him to Randall? Already one of Randall's men seemed a little suspicious of him, this Mike Carrigan. Suppose Shotten was found and had had the

train stopped? What was to prevent him from getting a horse at some nearby ranch and high-tailing it back here to Trails City to ruin this whole set-up?

Suddenly Jim no longer felt hungry. He got up from the table and walked out to the veranda. He'd better get out to the Boyetts right away, notify them without delay. He crossed the street to the livery stable, found out from the liveryman where the Boyetts lived, and a half hour later had reached the start of their barbed wire. Straight across the trail it stretched, while behind it, for as far as the eye could reach, rippled a sea of lush ripe wheat. The Boyetts had planted right across the old cattle trail; if any drives came through here now, that wheat would look as if a plague of locusts had swept it.

For a moment Jim's mind was preoccupied with thoughts of Judith Boyett, so that he didn't hear the hoofbeats until the horse was almost upon him. He turned with a start and saw Mike Carrigan.

Carrigan was sitting a big roan, eyeing him impassively. "Boss wants t'see yuh," he announced laconically.

"Randall! What about?"

"Didn't say."

A sharp foreboding stabbed Jim. This man could have been trailing him ever since he'd left Randall's—might have been *sent* to spy on him. He said, "Tell Randall I'll be back in half an hour."

Carrigan didn't move. "The boss said now."

* * *

WARNING pulled at Jim Antrim's nerves, gave him an abrupt, full realization of crisis. Carrigan plainly had no intention of letting him get out of his sight. Yet, if he went back now, it meant the loss of his chance to warn the homesteaders. And it meant that whatever happened later at the fence line, the homesteaders were going to believe him part and parcel of Randall's gang!

He cursed softly under his breath. Until he was sure Cray Randall was his man—until he'd had a chance to look at the top of that red cardboard box in Randall's safe—he had no choice but to keep up his pretense of playing the saloon owner's game.

He set his glance on Carrigan. "Okay," he said shortly, "let's go back."

They started back, Carrigan riding a little in back of him, and carefully maintaining that distance with his right hand held close to his holster. Carrigan didn't speak, and neither did he.

Back at the Pride, Jim found Randall in the office, waiting for him. Without preliminary, the saloon owner said, "Lew, what do you know about that shooting today over at the McSorley House?"

"Not a thing," Jim said guardedly. "Why should I?" and looked at the Pride's owner with deliberate coldness. "Furthermore, I don't like being followed around, Randall. By your men, or anybody else's."

"Followed around! You're imagining things!" Randall waved a curt dismissal to the charge. "But that shooting today was on the same floor you were on. And they found Matt Halliday's body in a room just a couple doors down from yours."

"What the devil are you getting at? You don't imagine I shot Halliday, do you?"

From the doorway, Matt Carrigan spoke flatly from beside Seco Smith: "Joe Breeder was shot dead, too. He was one of our men. But it wasn't Halliday plugged him. Halliday's iron hadn't been fired."

"Hah! So it's Breeder I shot then!" Jim stared derisively back at Randall. "I go out and pop off a man I don't even know—just for the fun of it, heh?"

Randall said, "Okay, okay," and scowled across at Mike Carrigan. "I told you you were crazy, Mike. You and Seco all set for that wire?"

Carrigan frowned. "Sure, but—"

"Then get started. It's nearly eight now; be dark in half an hour."

Jim noticed that Carrigan and Smith stayed clannishly together as they went out to the horses; he was cleared in Randall's eyes, but these two would be watching him like a pair of hawks. And as they mounted and started away, he suddenly was remembering Seco Smith's revelation that Johnny Boyett was one of the two homesteaders who patrolled that fence at night. A feeling of sick anger filled him as he thought of Judith Boyett and what his inexcusable carelessness might mean to her. Why in the name of common sense hadn't he had the brains to rack right over to Boyett's after leaving Randall's this afternoon? Why had he had to wait and have dinner at the hotel?

Various plans by which he might still circumvent Randall's men flashed through his mind now, but none seemed quite good enough, and one after another he rejected them. Finally, with grim resignation, he saw nothing to do but wait until they were at the fence, and then let circumstances decide his course of action.

It took them a half hour to get there; and it was dark as Seco Smith, riding a little ahead now, pulled up in the shelter of a motte of cottonwoods and stepped down from his horse. He turned and spoke to Jim. "This is a good place to picket the horses. You'd better keep watch from here while we're workin'."

Carrigan came up and dismounted. He said to Smith, "You start about twenty-five yards up to the left there, Seco. I'll work up towards you from down there in that dry wash."

He swung and faced Jim. "Don't try wanderin' around, Shotten," he warned coldly. "You might git taken for a homesteader—and Seco and me won't have no time to be askin' questions."

"Do your part of the job, Carrigan," Jim said curtly. "I'll tend to mine." He turned to watch Seco Smith moving away at a low crouch, wire cutters ready in his right hand. He heard Carrigan mumble something unintelligible, and then Carrigan, too, was a dwindling shadow as he skulked off in the direction opposite to that taken by Smith.

Jim moved out quietly from in back of the cottonwoods and stood tensed and listening, still able to discern the dim bulk that was Carrigan, off to his right. Seco Smith had already merged with the darkness, and in just another moment Carrigan would be.

* * *

JIM'S glance stabbed back to where his horse stood ground-hitched. He could back-track slowly out of here, leading the horse until he was far enough away to risk forking leather, and then make a break for it. He knew the general direction of the Boyett place; he'd high-tail it for there, first. Then—

From somewhere to the left a sharp twanging sound spun him around—a sound such as a taut wire might make, snapping apart! Jim's eyes strained against the darkness toward the spot where he had last seen Seco Smith. Seco had started cutting . . . and nothing had happened. Maybe—

The breath abruptly crowded back in Jim's throat. From five different points out there gunflame jetted suddenly, the ragged slam of the shots pounding the silence startlingly. Jim's pulses jerked. The homesteaders had five guards out there instead of the expected two. They weren't the ones being surprised; Randall's men were!

Jim felt his breath jam again as a pair of shots blared out from Seco Smith's

direction. A stuttering salvo flamed back from the homesteaders and at the same instant a weird cry quavered through the dark.

Jim went rigid. Had somebody got Seco? Those sod-busters out there were moved by a deadly singleness of purpose. They weren't fighting just to maintain a line of fence; they were fighting for their homes, their very existence. And they would be in no mood at such a time to listen to any such fantastic-sounding story as he would have to offer them.

Grimly, Jim turned. He had to get out of here—pronto. After the clamor of the guns, the silence that had fallen over the prairie seemed suddenly ominous. But now, off to the right, Jim heard faint, almost imperceptible movement. He stiffened with a hand raised to his holster, then relaxed. That would be Mike Carrigan, trying to steal back to his horse unnoticed. Well, he could only hope Carrigan would be trapped, the same as Seco Smith apparently had been. But as for himself. . . .

In the darkness, Jim found his roan and stroked its velvet muzzle reassuringly. "Okay, old fellow," he whispered. "You and me are shaggin' out of here."

He had the animal by the bridle, then, and was leading it slowly away from the cottonwoods. He'd make his wide circle now, up to the Boyett's place. The girl would likely be there alone, and he could at least make her listen to him. And once she was convinced, it ought not to be too hard a matter to convince the others.

They had come in over ground that had been soft and hoof-deadening, but now Jim suddenly realized that in the darkness he had lost his direction and was off the trail, on a rocky upslope that he couldn't remember at all.

Then, before he could find his way back to the trail, it happened. The horse slipped on a mossy rock and went down with an abrupt clatter. Jim swore as he yanked on the bridle and got the panicked animal back on its feet. He was none too quick. A rifle shot made its flat *s-p-a-n-g*, and a bullet hurtled past his ear.

Jim peered back, in this moment tensed and uncertain. He felt his heart lurch as two more shots rattled across the darkness. At the same instant he saw two shadows bulk up somberly behind him and grow gradually larger. Stalkers on horseback—and they were heading directly toward this spot!

Jim had a moment's wild impulse to cry out to them, and then realized sickeningly how futile it would be. He was the friend of these men, yes; but they didn't know it, and, ironically, if he tried to explain to them now, his reward would undoubtedly be a bullet in the belly.

He made up his mind abruptly. He could never hide from them here; his only chance was to make a run for it.

The roan sprang away as he vaulted into the saddle and slashed it with the spurs. A noisy slide of shale ran down the slope behind it, followed quickly by the sound of a shot. The slug was close, so close Jim could feel its hot breath fan his cheek.

He grimly bent lower in the saddle. A couple more seconds and he'd be over the top of this ridge.

There was another shot, and suddenly something seemed to strike Jim Antrim a terrific blow across the top of the head. A shower of light burst in front of his eyes and he had a sensation of falling abruptly into space. After that, he didn't remember. . . .

CHAPTER FIVE

Burnt Out!

ANTRIM was conscious of the whisky trickling down his throat; he choked and gaspingly made waving motions with his arm as he opened

his eyes. His head throbbed dully, but aside from that and a slight feeling of nausea he seemed to be all right. He saw that he was lying on a bunk in a cabin, and the man hunched over him with the whisky bottle was Johnny Boyett. Beside Johnny was the girl, Judith; and with her were two men, evidently homesteaders, whom he had never seen before.

He felt Johnny's eyes on him and sensed the contempt in the young homesteader's gaze.

"All right, sit up!" Johnny snapped. "You ain't dyin'—all that slug did was snip a little hunk out of your damned scalp."

Jim said dryly, "So that's all it was," and levered himself up experimentally in the bunk. Pain stabbed through his head as he swung his legs out over the side and put his feet down. His glance swept the row of hostile faces before him, stopped on Johnny's.

"I tried to tell you this before, Johnny," he began, "but you wouldn't listen to me. I'm not Lew Shotten. I'm Jim Antrim."

He swiftly told them then about his meeting with Lew Shotten on the train, and his decision to impersonate the Ute Springs marshal in an attempt to track down the murderer of his father.

"So you can see," he summed up, finally, "why I've got to get back, pronto, to Cray Randall's. I can't let him get suspicious of me before I get a chance to look at that red box. And I couldn't make a play before because Mike Carrigan and Seco Smith were both in the room with Randall. Next time, though, I'll get him alone. But I've got to do it before the real Shotten turns up—that is, if I aim to go on livin'," he concluded grimly.

There was a moment's lengthening silence. Johnny Boyett's voice coldly broke it. "I never heard Adam Antrim mention havin' a son."

"No, reckon you didn't," Jim admitted. "There was a reason for that, though." His glance crossed reluctantly to Judith Boyett, and for an instant he hesitated. Then he went on: "I figure you folks are friends of mine, so I'm going to tell you the truth. Eight years ago I helped rob a stage to get enough money to save dad's homestead. I didn't tell you this before, but that's why Shotten tried to arrest me this mornin'. He recognized me from a picture on an old reward dodger."

Jim paused while his eyes searched the unresponsive faces of the men, then the grave, quiet face of the girl. "The money in that red box I told you about," he finally continued, "represents the amount I personally got out of the holdup. It was cash I'd earned and sent on to dad to turn back to the express company. Whoever murdered dad got that money."

Judith Boyett's voice cut quickly into the pause. "And you think Cray Randall's the one who did it."

"I think he either did it or hired the one who did—which amounts to the same thing."

The girl turned impulsively to her brother. "I think he's telling the truth, Johnny," she said simply.

Boyett glared at her. "Well, I don't! It sounds too damned pat for me!" He wheeled and faced one of the other two homesteaders—a blond giant whom Jim had already guessed must be the night-riding Land Hulberg.

"What do you say, Land?" Johnny demanded abruptly.

Hulberg gave a stolid shrug. "How should I know? It may be the truth—or it may be a sharp trick of Randall's to plant somebody in here and work on us from the inside. If you ask me, though, we'd be fools to take a chance." As he spoke, he turned and concentrated a gloomy gaze out through the room's front window.

"How do you feel about it, Palmer?" Johnny said to the other homesteader.

"Same as Land here does," Ed Palmer

answered promptly. "We can't take a chance, Johnny. Randall's so low-down he's got callouses on his belly from crawlin' around like a snake. He could be up to anything."

"Yeah," Johnny breathed bitterly. "And suppose Shotten's comin' to town hadn't made us suspicious somethin' was up? Suppose we hadn't posted them extra guards tonight?" He turned and faced his sister. "You see how it is, Judy? We can't—"

A hoarse exclamation from Hulberg spun him around. "My God," the homesteader cried in a shocked voice, "look out there!"

Jim Antrim rose and stood looking with the others. And as he looked, a sick feeling of helplessness drained him. Away to the east a long band of fire was sweeping across the prairie, lighting the whole sky with its lurid glow.

* * *

"THE wheat!" Johnny blurted thickly. "The dirty skunks have circled around Charlie and Tom and set fire to the wheat!"

"The devils!" Land Hulberg gritted. "And there ain't one chance in a hundred of our—"

"The hell there ain't!" Johnny flung back at him. He strode to the bunk where Jim had been lying and snatched up the two blankets that were on it. He hurled them at the astonished Hulberg. "Here, go out and soak these at the well!" he barked. "And, Palmer, you do the same with them blankets from the other bunk! We'll rig ropes to the blankets and ride that strip of fire, draggin' 'em after us."

Pivoting abruptly, he jabbed a gun into Antrim's side. "Right through that back door for you," he ordered curtly. To Judith Boyett, he called back over his shoulder: "I'm lockin' him in the woodshed, Sis. You'll have to watch him till I get back, to see that he don't escape."

Jim didn't hear the girl's answer, if she made any. He walked through the doorway into a tiny kitchen, then suddenly felt himself pushed into a room that smelled pungently of sawdust. A door slammed, and he heard the rattle of a padlock as it was clicked shut. A sound of footsteps faded and then died out completely.

After that it seemed only a short time before a thud of hoofbeats came to his ears. The hoofbeats dwindled away in the distance and then almost at once were replaced by a sound of footsteps again.

Jim started as a tense voice—Judith Boyett's voice—came to him through the door chinks. "Jim, stand back! I'm going to smash the lock. Johnny took the keys with him."

For a heart-stopping instant, shock held Jim inarticulate with surprise. Blows came at the door before he could speak; and then it swung open and Judith Boyett stood before him.

Her right hand still gripped the ax with which she had smashed the padlock. Behind her, on the kitchen table, a lamp threw out its mellow radiance, showing him the grave attention of her eyes and the soft, curved ripeness of her body.

He spoke finally with a kind of breathlessness. "Don't you think this is a pretty big gamble you're takin', ma'am?"

Her eyes—he noticed now for the first time what a very deep amber they were—continued their steady scrutiny of him.

"Perhaps it is," she admitted slowly. Then, with a grave smile: "But perhaps I think it's a gamble that's worth the risk. . . ."

Jim Antrim felt the familiar tension run along his nerves as he rode into Main Street and saw the lights still burning in the Pride. He pulled out his watch and in the street's half darkness could just make out the time—almost half past twelve. Another thirty minutes or so and he

might have missed this chance entirely.

Randall would, no doubt, still be there, waiting for a report; he'd have to gamble that Mike Carrigan wouldn't be back yet —or Seco Smith, in the unlikely event Seco wasn't either wounded or dead.

He thought of Judith Boyett, remembered her words back there in the cabin. *Perhaps I am gambling,* she had said. *But perhaps it's a gamble that's worth the risk.* The words heartened him and, thinking of her, he felt a warm glow.

He pulled rein suddenly and stepped down from his horse. He was in front of the Pride; and then he was across the deserted board walk and shouldering through the grilled batwings.

He was almost to the door of Cray Randall's office when it opened suddenly and Randall walked out. At sight of Jim, he halted abruptly.

"So it's you!" he fumed. "Damn it, not a word from any of you yet—and here it's nearly one o'clock already!"

Jim felt a stab of elation as Randall swung around and started back into the office. Even without the blunt words, Randall's frayed temper would have been enough to tip him off to the fact that neither Carrigan nor Seco Smith had been heard from yet.

Jim threw a quick look behind him as he followed the saloon owner into the office. Only the bartender and a couple of late loungers remained at the bar; it looked as if this was the chance he had been waiting for. Nevertheless an odd mistrust filled him as he watched Randall move over behind the desk and then turn, eyeing him impatiently.

"Well, what about it?" Randall snapped. "Did you get it done all right?"

Jim decided not to delay; to get it over with fast, before this chance was gone.

He took a grim relish in going for his Colt and watching Randall's eyes freeze as he brought it up.

"We can talk about that later," he said quietly. "Right now, I want you to go over there and open that safe for me."

He took two cautious steps backward as he spoke, and without taking his eyes from the saloon owner's, calmly locked the door and dropped the key in his pocket.

Randall hadn't moved. He stood looking at Jim with a shocked stare.

"Are you crazy?" he blurted hoarsely. "Damn it, this is a hell of a time to be playing jokes, Lew!"

"Would be," Jim murmured. "If it was a joke." He made a curt motion with the Colt. "Only I ain't jokin', Randall. Start workin' on that combination."

Randall's baffled stare held Jim's for one irresolute moment longer; then with a muttered exclamation, he wheeled and crossed over to the safe. His hand trembled as he fumbled with the dial, but in another moment he had the door open and had turned an inquiring glance back at Jim.

"Now take out that red cardboard box," Jim told him, "and bring it over here to the desk."

Randall stiffened at this, and at the same instant shot a glance up to where his gun belt hung from a wooden peg above the safe.

"Don't try anything foolish!" Jim snapped. "Just get over here with that box—and don't waste any more time about it."

Randall brought it over and with sullen reluctance flung it down on the desk. "Damn it, Lew," he burst out, "if you'd just tell me what your game was, maybe we could—"

He broke off suddenly as Jim picked up the box, *glanced once at the zigzag mark scratched across the top of it,* and then threw it down again.

Jim's eyes were utterly cold. "Ever hear of vigilante law, Randall?" he asked softly.

"Sure," Randall jibed, "and I've heard

of hombres goin' loco, too—hombres that thought they were gun marshals."

Jim quietly ignored the ridicule. "Vigilante law—I'm aimin' to give you a taste of it, Randall," he went on. "I'm aimin' to see you stretch the loop of the same *maguay* you twisted around the neck of Adam Antrim."

Cray Randall abruptly went rigid. "Antrim! Say, what the devil are you talking about? Who—"

"I'm Jim Antrim. Adam Antrim's son," Jim said.

* * *

RANDALL'S face drained white under the shock. "Jim Antrim!" he gasped. "You're loco! Adam Antrim never had a son! He—"

"Johnny Boyett had that same idea," Jim cut in grimly. "But now I reckon we'll be able to convince him different. Turn around, Randall. We're rackin' out."

"NESTER, STAND AND FIGHT!"

Once those words were a battle cry for freedom. Don't miss this thrilling novel by Rolland Lynch—about a man who paved his way to glory over a road of blood and bullets, during those tragic days when brothers who had fought side by side to win the West, turned on each other when dividing the spoils.

Here is the greatest value in Western fiction today—130 pages crammed from cover to cover with hair-trigger action. . . . *Fifteen stories in every issue!*

WESTERN TALES

15 STORIES 15 CENTS

"Out? Look, you can't get away with this, Antrim! I've got men out there. You'd never get past the bar."

"One bartender and a couple of drunken punchers," Jim scoffed. "But in case you had any idea of tryin' to signal the barkeep, don't. This gun'll be right here in the pocket of my coat. And my finger'll be right around the trigger of it, Randall."

He kept his eyes trained watchfully on the saloon owner as he backed to the door and unlocked it.

Jim nodded toward the door. "You're first. But remember, I'll be right behind you."

His glance didn't deviate from the saloon owner as he stepped through the door after him. What came then happened damned fast.

A voice rapped out, "Hoist 'em, and don't move!" and at the same instant he felt guns prodding him from both sides and felt his own gun being taken away.

A sick despair flooded him as he recognized Mike Carrigan's voice. *And then he turned and saw Lew Shotten!*

The marshal of Ute Springs stood spraddle-legged on his high heels, his gun jammed against Jim's thigh.

He said, "So we meet again, after all," and took his humorless enjoyment out of the moment. "You see, Mason," he added mildly, "that was a mighty inquisitive conductor we had this morning. He got so inquisitive when I didn't get back to my seat that he started a search."

Cray Randall whirled on Mike Carrigan. "Mike, who is this hombre?"

Carrigan humanly made no effort to keep the elation out of his voice. "It's Lew Shotten—the real Lew Shotten," he emphasized. "I told you, boss, didn't I—"

"Never mind that!" Randall spun and faced Shotten. "So you're the marshal! And this hombre's name is Mason?"

"Luke Mason," amplified Shotten with a nod. "Wanted for a stage holdup in

Holderness County eight years ago. And still worth five hundred dollars to the man who brings him in," he appended.

Randall turned back to Carrigan. "Where's Seco?"

"Seco's dead," Carrigan said. "They got him the minute he started on the wire. Yuh see—" Carrigan stopped, tensing suddenly. "What was that, boss? Anybody in your office?"

"No, no! Go on—tell me!"

"Well, they must've got a tip from somewhere," Carrigan went on, and threw an ugly look at Jim Antrim. "Anyway, they had extra guards out. I got away and burned out part of their wheat —they could only save about half of it. But the blasted wire's still up."

"It won't be much longer," Randall snapped. "Well, come on—"

His words broke off.

Someone said quietly from the office doorway, "Maybe that wire'll be up longer than you think, Randall," and with an amazed stare Jim looked up and saw Johnny Boyett.

In Johnny's right hand was a leveled Colt, and before anyone could recover from the shock of staring at it Johnny was coolly continuing: "My friend Mr. Palmer's stationed at the front door, gents—in case any of you were thinking of leaving by the main entrance. And he's dehorned them two sad-looking cowboys, so don't expect anything from them, either."

"You young fool!" Randall snarled at him, and at the same moment flung a caustic glance at Lew Shotten.

Shotten didn't move, but Mike Carrigan did.

Johnny fired first, but Carrigan's shot was as quick upon it as an echo. With horror, Jim saw Johnny slump down in the doorway. Then he realized that Carrigan was stumbling back, gasping. Carrigan crashed into a table, toppling it, and with a leap Jim had his gun.

He had the gun up as he rose from behind the table, but Shotten's bullet punched him in the shoulder and he ducked back with a pained grunt. He still had the gun leveled over the table top, however, and for the space of a clock-tick Shotten was a clear target under the lamplight. Jim fired.

He saw Shotten go down, and in the same instant was aware of Randall stooped over Johnny, savagely yanking at Johnny's gun as the young homesteader weakly fought against his effort to grab it.

For a moment Jim couldn't see to shoot. A red haze swam up before him, and Randall was only a blur in front of his eyes. Dimly, he heard Ed Palmer let out a yell from the doorway and twisted around to the see the bartender lurching up from behind the bar with a shotgun in his hands. Two shots merged in a shivering detonation as Jim's glance stabbed back at Randall.

The owner of the Pride had just

RIDE with the OUT-TRAIL CARAVAN

—to high adventure on the last frontier! Follow the ACE-HIGH trail-breakers to exciting hours of reading pleasure! In the big January issue, don't miss—

GUNMAN'S HOLIDAY
By John G. Pearsol

and

THE GREAT HORSETHIEF SYNDICATE
By J. E. Grinstead

Also, in the all-star January issue, you'll find a wide variety of other dramatic Western stories, long and short, by more of your favorite writers!

January issue on sale Nov. 26th

THE COWBOY'S MAGAZINE
10¢ Ace-High Western Stories MAGAZINE

wrenched Johnny's gun away from him and was swiveling up at a low crouch with it. He fired a shot that ripped a fan-shaped wedge of splinters from the top of Jim's table, then whirled and sprang toward the bar.

Pain in Jim's shoulder was a throbbing agony as he steadied his arm on the table rim. He squeezed the trigger of the Colt.

A reddish mist was thickening in front of his eyes again as he saw Randall stumble and drop to a knee, then to both knees. Unsteadily, he hoisted himself up from behind the table and took a weaving step toward the saloon owner, the Colt half raised.

Quick as a cat, Randall jerked up his head and fired. Jim felt the bruising smash of the lead in his right arm; a thousand new pains exploded through his body as he unsteadily leveled the Colt again. Its crash seemed to stun his brain, left him standing there a moment longer, wobbling drunkenly.

He had a vague realization of Randall slumping down, and then for the second time that night darkness gathered him in . . . .

* * *

JIM ANTRIM'S return to consciousness was like a slow, pleasant drifting into a quiet harbor. At first there seemed to be a mist over everything, but then this cleared and he saw that the harbor was his room at the hotel, and that it was bright daylight. The girl stooped over his bed looking down at him had serious eyes, a slow, grave smile.

"I hope you're feeling better," Judith Boyett said.

Jim stared at her in slow realization, and then he saw Johnny Boyett. Johnny stood a little behind her, his right arm in a sling.

"Reckon sis was right, Jim," Johnny said. "I sure do owe you an apology."

"Apology! After what you and Palmer did?" Jim said.

Johnny looked embarrassed. "Well, you see we didn't go there figurin' you was in any tight. We went to get you back, so we could pump you about Randall's plans."

Jim grinned. "And then you happened to overhear that talk in Randall's office, and after Randall and the rest had gone out, you climbed in through a window."

Johnny grinned back. "You could of been there yourself."

"What happened?" Jim sighed. "Did I get Randall?"

"Yeah, Randall's dead. And Lew Shotten. Carrigan's unconscious; they don't know if he'll pull through yet."

"What about your friend Palmer?" Jim said.

"He got a dose of buckshot in the legs, but he killed that bartender."

Jim was quiet, staring up at the ceiling. He didn't hear Johnny go out, but when he looked up again, only Judith Boyett was in the room with him.

"Doctor Hazlett asked me to stay and look after you for a few days," she explained simply.

Jim frowned. "You'd better keep away from me," he told her harshly. "Yesterday it was Lew Shotten recognized me. Today it may be somebody else. You don't want to get mixed up in anything like that." And his bitter stare went back to the ceiling.

She spoke with quiet confidence. "The past will bury itself, Jim. There'll be a new life for you here. Wait and see."

He took his eyes from the ceiling and gave her a searching glance. Somehow, from the way she'd said that, he felt almost able to believe it himself. He relaxed on the bed with a contented sigh. The least he could do would be to wait and see. . . .

THE END

Gun-Ghost From Juarez

By BRAD BUCKNER

With a curse clogging his throat, Rod went up and over in the saddle.

How could Rod Farnsworth decree war to the death against range-stealing longriders—when their blazing guns had already dumped him in a Juarez cemetery?

FOR six long months Rod Farnsworth had been away from the Double T spread and his partner, Grant Jordon. It hadn't taken him that long to buy the three-quarter blooded Spanish broncs that he now sent thundering across the Beaver Creek ford. The reason he had been away so long was that a mysterious cutbank artist near Juarez had put him flat on his back and time had passed swiftly while he recovered.

Now, though trail dust lay heavy on his rugged features, his brown face glowed with pride as he watched the band of spirited ponies splash through the creek. They were, he thought, animals any man would be proud to call his own. You didn't find that kind of stuff running wild on the mesas. You fought for them, bled for them, sank every cent you had in them —then tossed your life into the gamble of chousing them home. No smuggling train loaded with dobie dollars was more coveted than a hundred head of Spanish mestanos like this bunch.

He walked his mount on as the band started up the steep trail beyond the stream. His lithe, slab-muscled body swayed easily in the saddle as he rode. Under levis, conchoed chaps and a dusty shirt was a whang-leather and steel body tempered to oak hardness by years of work on the range.

Now the last low mesquite-covered ridge loomed between the herd and the Double T land. A living stream of color, the horses poured up the trail. But as the blue leader exploded over the rise, he slowed suddenly, set his forefeet and whirled to a stop. Mane flying in the fitful

breeze, he sniffed daintily. Then he began pawing the ground lightly.

Wondering, Rod passed the herd and pushed up beside him. On the open range below part of the prize Double T horse herd milled restlessly. What the hell was Grant thinking of, thought Rod? He knew very well the pasturage was inferior down here.

Then Rod's cheek felt an angry breath of wind. A second later the flat crack of a high-powered rifle rang out over the dusty trail.

With a curse clogging his throat, Rod went up and over in the saddle and clung precariously to the animal's side while he sliced a Colt from the holster on his thigh. But even as the sun glinted on the cold blue of the sixgun barrel, the rifle cracked again. Rod felt the pony falter and start to fall.

Quickly he kicked his feet loose from the stirrups and vaulted away. But he was too late. Squealing shrilly, the animal stumbled against him, knocked him down the steep trail beyond the ridge and fell upon him. In a second he had rolled free, but his face was white with the agony of a sprained knee. His gun was gone.

In the next moment his blood froze as the thunder of drumming hoofs shook the earth beneath him. Shots cracked sharply over the sound. And down the trail pounded the first half-dozen fear-crazed members of the herd. The mustangs were being stampeded. They were being rushed down the narrow path to trample him to death.

Desperately, he plunged to the trailside, pressing through the tough, clinging mesquite branches, while in a curtain of roiling dust the thoroughbreds sped down upon him. Rod set his teeth against the sickening pain of his crushed leg, gambling with time. And he lost. He was only half way into the brush when the racing horses cut him down, their racing legs smashing his body about.

ROD'S mind writhed down into a red whirlpool of pain as unshod hoofs swept over him, pounding and slashing. Streaks appeared in the caked dust on his face where cold sweat ate through the alkali. With the last strength of his arms he pulled himself off the trail as the herd and its captors swept past.

There was new agony in this thought, almost overriding the physical pain. He'd come all the way from Mexico, only to lose his charges on the very doorstep of his home. Through his fading consciousness the faint cries of the men who were driving the mustangs away came to his ears. Those horses had cost every cent he and Grant had been able to save for the last five years. Now they were gone, scooped up by some sons who figured smoking guns were all they needed for a bill of sale.

As the heavier dirt thrown up by the stampede sifted down through the dust screen a horseman rode up, forcing his way through the heavy brush.

"Crawled in your hole to hide, did you, Farnsworth?" the man rasped. White teeth flashed behind heavy lips as he grinned. "It'd have been better for you if you'd stayed dead in Mexico. It takes longer this way." He holstered his gun when he saw Rod's weaponless condition. Then, abruptly, he sank spurs to his horse and drove forward.

Rod caught a glimpse of a heavy, full-jowled face covered with two or three days growth of beard and a scar that gave a squint to the man's right eye. Then trampling hoofs blotted all else out. A cry choked from Rod's lips. Back and forth the man rode, quirting his horse to the grisly work. And finally darkness closed over Rod, blotting out the dusty, hot hillside and the hell of pain which racked him. . . .

Far up in the blue a tiny speck wheeled. It descended in gradually narrowing

circles, growing rapidly in size as it came nearer, sweeping closer and closer to the motionless body on the hillside. But within a few yards the buzzard let out a harsh, frightened squawk and flapped clumsily away as Rod moved and struggled over on his side.

Pain held him in a tightening grip, like drying rawhide. He tried to drag himself out to the trail. The mesquite branches were fingers of iron, holding him back, imprisoning him. Leaden thoughts dragged slowly through his confused brain, their delayed progress imitating his broken, tortured crawl. Where was Grant? What had happened here in the valley where they had built up the Double T spread. Who was the bearded, squint-eyed man, and how had he known about the ambush in Juarez?

Then there was movement at his side. Something touched him, pushed against him with a soft, silky muzzle. Rod put out his hand to the sleekness of a horse's head. He looked up with slitted eyes at a big gray mare. His lips cracked in a grin.

"Sleet," he choked.

Here was the first sign of home. The mare was the first of his own string.

Grasping the muscular neck with his arm, Rod pulled himself up to a sitting posture. From there he worked himself gradually up onto Sleet's back, eyes clamped shut, teeth buried in his lower lip as each movement of his battered body brought searing torture. When Sleet moved off down the hillside it took every atom of Rod's will to retain consciousness. For though the mare seemed to understand and proceeded at a slow walk, still each step was a barbed thrust at his wounds.

After a time a voice reached him. "What is it, Sleet? What d'you want?"

The mare was nuzzling a man mixing flapjack batter before the entrance to an old mine. Letting go of Sleet's mane, Rod slid to the ground. Then he stared.

At his first slight sound, the old man had spun about and a long-barreled hog-leg now menaced Rod. It was fixed unerringly upon his heart, yet the man was blind. The hammer was back, a gnarled finger curled around the trigger, when Rod managed a startled shout through cracked lips.

"Grant! It's me—Rod!"

Amazement replaced the rage on the oldster's face. Then recognition washed

that away and left a dawning happiness. The gun-wound along the side of his head faded from purple to a dull red.

"Rod. It *is* you, ain't it?" The blind eyes swept uselessly back and forth, searching for Farnsworth. "But—but how come, pardner? Buckholtz said you was dead. Said he saw you gunned down in Juarez—"

"Who's Buckholtz?"

"Solly Buckholtz, Squint Lang's chief gunny. He come up the Chisum Trail with the news."

Rod forced himself up and leaned for support against the rocky wall at the mine entrance. His face froze, set in chill lines. "Solly . . . that's what they called him in that lousy joint. He should know about me being gunned down, all right. He did it himself."

Rod's glance swung to Grant, remained glued to the sightless eyes. "Who did that to you, Grant?" he asked softly. There was a wound there, an ugly furrow that had undoubtedly caused blindness.

Grant looked off across the plain toward the Double T ranchhouse, and his voice dropped low, began to click off the syllables like the warning rattle of a snake.

"A big gent, boy. Stands six feet above the ground he's gonna be under. Always shaves three days late. Has a squint to his right eye. Squint Lang—the man who owns the Double T.

* * *

IN THE clear stillness of the valley, the big gray mare made the only sound where she moved about the pole corral adjoining the mine entrance, nibbling at bunch grass.

The two men seemed carved of stone.

Rod's bruised body crouched at the edge of the rock shelf, his mind absorbing the blinding information that their ranch, the spread they'd built up from nothing, was gone—in the hands of an arrogant renegade who rode better men down into the dust.

Grant knew what a blow his news would be to his young partner, and his face twisted with pain as he went on. "Lang rode into Lathrop with his gang of yellow-bellied cutthroats just after you left. Cattle started disappearing and two of the boys was bushwhacked. What waddies Lang couldn't get that-away he tricked into quarrels in town, shot 'em down, and claimed self-defense.

"Then, after Solly Buckholtz brought the news you were dead, they came out to the ranch with a deed to the Double T and tried to make me sign it. If you were dead I'd be sole owner, and the spread would belong to Lang if I'd sign that paper. I didn't do it, boy, though they used a blacksnake on me."

A grim purpose seeped into Rod's taut body as Grant went on. "After that they gunned me down and left me for dead in a cutbank. When I come to I was blind. And that's about all there is, except that they forged that paper somehow. The Double T is legally theirs."

Closing his mouth with a click, Grant explored Rod's wounds with shaking fingers. He rolled him onto a clean blanket. Then he brought water from the spring nearby and sponged off the bloody, tattered clothing. A half hour later, Rod lay propped against a saddle, dressed in old but clean levis and shirt. A steaming plate of flapjacks on the rock beside him brought life to his tired eyes.

"Where do you get your supplies?" he asked Grant.

"Sleet knows the way into town. Whenever I climb aboard that's where she goes. I had a little money left, enough to eat on. I figured at first maybe Lang would finish the job when he saw me, but I guess he thinks he's got nothing to be afraid of from me." Gnarled fingers splayed over the polished walnut of the long-barreled sixgun Grant had drawn so

quickly before he had recognized Rod. "I'd like to get his voice for a bull's-eye," Grant finished softly, his sightless eyes looking into space.

Rod's thoughts went back to the way Grant had handled the gun. There was no getting around it. If he had pulled the trigger, Rod would have died. And sound had been the only thing Grant had had to go on for sighting the weapon.

"How'd you learn to handle a gun that way if you can't see?" Farnsworth asked finally.

"By sound," Grant answered. "After I gave you up for dead, I didn't care very much about anything. But I had to do something to keep from going crazy. Come here. I'll show you how I worked it."

With Grant's help, Rod managed to hobble back into the mine shaft. Opening to one side was a room, roughly circular. In here, Grant had arranged a dozen flat mine timbers, each about the height of a man, around the walls. To every one was fastened a small piece of wood, hinged at the top. And from each of these a string led to a ring mounted over the door. When the strings were gathered in a bunch this way it was impossible to tell which was which.

While Rod watched, Grant selected a string and pulled. Off to the right one of the hinged pieces of wood came up. Grant stared straight ahead. Then as he loosed the string he dropped into a crouch. The sound of the wood slapping the plank was drowned instantly in the roar of gunfire. With the speed of light Grant had drawn and fired. A shower of splinters leaped out from the plank at the height of a man's heart.

"I've been practicing a long time, boy," Grant said. "Did I hit it?"

Rod stared around at the planks, each with its quota of bullet holes. "You hit it, Grant," he said softly. "You sure hit it."

THROUGHOUT the night Rod's aching body lay motionless in the blankets, but his thoughts seethed. Sleep came only in fitful snatches, interspersed with red hatred of Squint Lang, Solly Buckholtz and the gun-hung scum that followed them. He'd seen the brand before, men who cold-decked their way through life, backing up their shady plays with the one irrefutable argument—ready sixguns.

There was a way of calling their powdersmoke bluff, but first he'd have to try law and order. They held a legal claim to the Double T now, and if he ignored that claim and carried open warfare to their door he'd be as guilty of lawlessness as they were. And Rod had no intention of getting Sheriff Chet McCormick of Lathrop on his own trail.

Four days he forced himself to wait, while the sun baked his stiffening body and Grant worked bear grease into muscles that were cramped with pain. In mid-morning of the fifth day he stood up. His eyes touched the ridge he'd come riding across only a few days ago. He'd been homeward bound to his own spread, bringing blooded horseflesh that would start a glad light shining in the eyes of his old partner. Now the horses were gone, the ranch was gone—and those eyes would never again see anything.

His attention shifted below the ridge to the valley that stretched out in undulating waves to a backdrop of purple haze in the distance, bordered on one side by the twisting, shining Laramie River and by the frowning scarps of the Seminoes on the other. Down there, close against the hills, huddled Lathrop town, and half way between was the Double T. In one of those places he'd find Squint Lang. His eyes darkened.

"You got an extra gun, Grant, and a hull for the sorrel there?"

Grant's sightless face turned anxiously toward Rod. "You ain't going no-

where, are you son? You can't travel with them legs the way they are. Besides, going down there now is like stepping on rattlers."

"I aim to find out things," Rod rasped, his lips pressed tight against the dull, hurting deadness in his legs as he made his way toward the corral containing Sleet and the sorrel.

Grant followed him in a minute, with two saddles.

Rod took one. "No dice, Grant. You wait here. I'm not carrying fire to their tinder—yet. When I do, we'll ride together."

Leaving the gray mare for Grant, he threw the hull on the sorrel and climbed stiffly aboard, and with his holster once more holding steel he rode down into the valley.

This was home ground. He knew this sage and gramma grass covered valley as he knew the back of his own hand. Working in a semi-circle, he approached the Double T from a low knoll that rolled down onto the ranch buildings. Leaving his horse ground-hitched, Rod eased down the slope with only clumps of sage for shelter. A hard expression twisted his lips when he saw that the ranch had been let run down. Lang was probably trying to sell the place and realize a quick profit. Until such time he kept up only a semblance of activity.

Sounds of a poker game came from the bunkhouse. A big, dark-browed man leaned against a far corral, staring moodily at nothing. Through such lax vigilance it was easy to reach the ranchhouse. The squeaking of floorboards raised no alarm. So he eased into the office to the right of the door.

The safe still stood in the corner behind the desk. Lang had blown it open. It was closed now but not locked. With Rod dead, either in Mexico or on the hillside, Lang had become careless. Rod swung the door open and rummaged hurriedly through the contents with steady hands.

In a few seconds he had what he wanted —the deed to the Double T. He stared thoughtfully at the signature. It was Grant's, all right, or a perfect forgery. Turning to get better light, he noticed a folded letter that slid from the legal document. Picking it up, he saw it was signed with Grant's real signature. Lang evidently kept this for proof. On an impulse, he held them both against the window, one over the other.

With a start, he bent closer. They were a perfect match—too perfect! A surge of hope swept through Rod. If he could get these to the sheriff, they would serve to convict Lang, for no one ever signs his name *exactly* the same. There is always a slight variation. Yet these two signatures were identical in every respect. One *had* to be a forgery.

Turning to the door, he jerked to a stop. Crouched there was a dark spider of a man with a gun in each hand.

* * *

ROD'S narrowed glance took in the short, wiry legs and hunched, skinny shoulders, the gray-green glitter in the eyes. They took him back to a smoky, stinking Juarez saloon and a little man who sat at a corner table just before Rod felt the smashing pain of bushwhack slugs in his back. This was Solly Buckholtz.

"Those papers," Buckholtz gestured with one gun, "put them on the desk."

Rod reached them forward, purposely slowing the move, playing for time. His glance, sharpened to pin-point attention, ran over the room and the little killer. From the bunkhouse came the muffled sounds of the poker game. If he made a play he'd have to make it fast, before those time-killing waddies could sprint the distance from the bunkhouse to the main ranch building.

Then his questing eyes saw the board he stood on. It was long, running under the partition and out into the hall. He remembered that when the floorboard had squeaked out there it had also found an echo here in the office. It was a tiny thing to bank on but was worth a try. Without moving a muscle, he set himself.

"Come on!" Buckholtz rasped impatiently. "Quit stalling!" The small gunman's voice was pitched high with strain. The task of facing a man he had thought twice dead was evidently hard on his nerves. Rod counted on that. He put the papers on the desk. At the same time he shifted his weight to the long board.

In the hall there was a sharp squeak. Like darting bull-bats, Solly's eyes jerked that way. And Rod acted. Falling sideways, he dived away from the desk, bringing his outstretched hand up his thigh to rake the sixgun from its holster in one continuous motion.

Solly's guns flamed, searching for Rod. The room rocked to their concussion. Through the rising gray powdersmoke Rod blasted his reply, aware even as he saw his lead tally that he might be caught here, like a rat in a trap. Hoarse voices sounded from the bunkhouse. The ranchyard echoed to the running clump of boots. As Solly whirled back out the doorway Rod barged through, sweeping up the papers from the desk as he went.

"Solly!" someone called from the porch. "What the hell?"

A gun flamed there as they saw Rod and the fallen Buckholtz. Rod triggered and showered them with splinters from the doorjamb. They backed out, and he turned and dived down the hall to the back of the house. The big dark man who had been standing at the corral was at the back door, a little undecided whether to come in or not. Rod drove into him and knocked him sprawling. His stiffened, aching legs had punched him to the first clump of sage on the slope before they swirled out into the open behind him.

They skidded to a stop when he drove lead into the ground at their feet. And he was up the knoll and mounted before they thought to make for the corrals and their unsaddled horses. . . .

Rod timed his arrival in Lathrop for twilight, when color values faded into dull gray shadow and the pale gold of lamplight had not yet begun to spill from batwinged doorways. Hat pulled low, Rod strode into Sheriff Chet McCormick's office. Just inside the door he paused, staring warily at the stranger behind the desk.

For the swift action and gripping human drama of the West that really was, read NEW WESTERN every month! The next issue will be out January 2nd!

"Yeah?" the man said. He was tall, with the face of a fox and narrow, suspicious eyes.

"Where's McCormick?" Rod asked.

"His string ran out and he lit a shuck. I'm Sheriff Charlie Kruff, and I'm ramrodin' this town now. What's itchin' you?"

Rod looked him over. The new sheriff was a hard man to figure. He wasn't taking anything and he wasn't giving anything. He said his say and waited.

"You know some new owners moved in on the Double T?" Rod said as a feeler.

"Yeah, yeah," Kruff answered impatiently. "I saw their deed. It's on the level, and a duplicate's registered in the land office. What's it to you?"

"I'm the man they killed to get that ranch."

Kruff's eyes popped open at that. May-

be it was the way Rod said it. Maybe it was something else. But the sheriff's manner lost its brusk impatience, and a trace of uneasiness crept in. He quickly throttled it under Rod's level stare.

"Yeah? Well I ain't got time for your funny jokes, stranger. If you got a claim, you'll have to prove it."

"I'll prove it," Rod said. "Light that lamp there, and I'll show you the deed and the signature they forged it from."

Kruff had risen to his feet and reached toward the lamp when a voice came softly from the doorway. "He's stringin' you, Kruff, and he's dangerous. Watch him!"

The lamp flared up, disclosing the half dozen men who crowded swiftly into the room. Rod recognized the bearded face and squinting eye of the leader. He'd seen him last through dust and sweat and pain. Memory of that hell of torment beneath driving hoofs shot his hand holsterward. But Lang's guns were already out, forestalling the move.

"See that, Sheriff?" Lang said triumphantly, at Rod's jerky movement. "He's a killer. Busted into the Double T this afternoon and killed my foreman, Solly Buckholtz, after stealin' some valuable papers from the safe. I'm glad to see you already have him under arrest. But he's acting mighty suspicious, as if maybe he was thinkin' of trying to run. Reckon you could deputize me quick enough so's I could drop him before he escapes?"

Behind the grim humor in Lang's words was deadly purpose. Rod knew Lang meant to kill him.

* * *

ROD cursed himself for a fool. Sheriff Kruff was crooked. He should have sensed it the second he walked in. The lawman was merely another of Lang's pawns. Now Lang had Rod dead to rights. As a deputy, he could kill the ex-owner of the Double T and get away with it on the grounds that Rod was escaping from custody of the law.

As the renegade chieftain saw all the cards were running his way he eased up a little, and a sloppy grin creased his face. "You got anything to say, Farnsworth?"

Rod knew Lang was waiting for him to crawl. "Yeah," Rod said. He knew he was going to die. And suddenly he didn't care. If somehow he could plant his bullets in that big body and blot the man's evil presence from the earth before he himself cashed in his chips, then he could die with a smile on his lips. He should never have tried the law and order way. He should have carried the fight to Lang openly, gaining the advantage of surprise. But it was too late for all that now. It was too late for anything but to die.

Tension left him. The hushed expectancy of the room acted like a drum-roll on his pulses. He went for Grant's gun. It seemed to leap to meet his hand, so fast did his reflexes bring his muscles into the flashing speed of a draw which had a prayer behind it. He set himself to meet the smashing impact of Lang's lead, sure it would come before he could trigger.

"Hell!" Lang's single word was full of hushed surprise. He couldn't understand a man who would make gunplay when there wasn't a chance of a snowball in Hades of getting anywhere with it. The gun-boss shoved his weapons forward, clamped down on the triggers.

But his hands were dead. A single shot had come from the window in that tiny fraction of time when such a shot could win the advantage. It split Lang's breastbone, smashed the life out of him, and dropped him, a sodden hulk, on the floor.

In that second of surprise Rod saw the man framed between the breeze-stirred curtains. He was blind. But his steady sixgun seemed to have an intelligence of its own as it menaced the room, waiting for sound.

"Rattle your hocks, pard!" Grant bellowed above the ringing echoes of the guns.

"Here, Grant!" Rod roared back. "Let 'em roll!"

He swung to the side of the window. Their .45's rolled twin thunder into the room, fire to meet the flame of the enemy. Sheriff Kruff and the remaining gunnies met that attack with cursing, savage resistance.

Three went down. That left two, and Sheriff Kruff. As Rod punched his third load at Kruff and saw the crooked star-carrier pitch to the floor, he caught a glimpse of Grant's sinking form. The oldster's gun sagged from stiffening fingers, and he dropped from view. The sight was like cold steel at Rod's heart. He spun and blasted one of the remaining gunmen across the desk just as the last one disappeared out the door.

Rod leaped out the window and lifted Grant's motionless form in his arms.

"Pard," he gasped.

Relief was like a ray of blinding sunlight in the darkness. Grant stirred and blinked his eyes. Working over him in the dim lamplight from the sheriff's office, Rod found that the only wound was on the side of the oldster's head.

Rod let out pent-up breath as Grant opened his eyes and returned to consciousness. "You had me worried for a minute," he husked. "But now everything's gonna be smooth sailing."

He stopped as he noticed the intent way Grant's face was turned toward him.

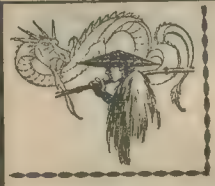
"Rod," Grant asked, "when did you start wearin' green shirts?"

Understanding seeped into Rod slowly. He was almost afraid to believe what the other's words told him. But one look at Grant's face was enough.

"Yep," Grant said, in amazement. "I can see. Kruff's bullet must have hit the same nerve Lang's did. Anyway, it fixed me up."

And those laughing, almost doubting words, cleared up for good and all the specter of hatred and pain that had met Rod when he returned from Mexico. Lang and his kind were no longer a thing to be feared or fought.

"How about a drink before we get back to the spread," Rod grinned. "There's a lot of work to be done there—cleanin' up!"



"VIVA CHINA!"

This gripping two-part novel of the Sino-Japanese War today, by James Norman, takes you on a camouflaged train up the Yellow River Valley, where you'll meet American ambulance drivers, British newspaper correspondents, soldiers, coolies, refugees—all the welter of humanity swimming against the flood tide of invasion—and one character you won't forget: Gimiendo Hernandez Quinto—G.H.Q. to his American friends—blood cousin to Pancho Villa, commander of the Guerrilla Fighters' Training School at Lingtung, and the best damn *caballero* in all China!

Plus a thrilling novelette of the Caribbean Neutrality Patrol—"Murder in Martinique" by Richard Howells Watkins; Thomas H. Raddall's "Petticoat Pilot," culled from the log of the *Linda M.* and proving that ladies and lime-juicers don't mix; "Three Roads Home," an unusual Western by Jack Byrne; "Kag the Killer," a tale of the dawn of man, by John Murray Reynolds; "Riders East," a factual account of the Great Cowboy Race, by Walter Livingston; and the usual features found only in Adventure!

Adventure 15c

On Sale November 7th

He spotted Tod Winters and Sam Cleghorn mixing it furiously in the dust-filled circle.

Would outcast sawbones Jim Dennis make that one careless scalpel cut that would eliminate forever his helpless fighting partner and bring Dennis his long awaited legacy of power and glory—and the forbidden woman who'd driven him mad?

CODE FOR A FRONTIER SAWBONES

By MAX KESLER

RAIN slanted in from the low, wide eaves of Fritz Schmidt's general store and streamed down the fancy plate-glass window the little German had freighted all the way from Kansas City. The rain beaded the grim faces and oiled slickers of the rivermen as they plodded through the knee-deep mud of the street toward the mercantile.

His thin white face pressed against the window glass, Doctor Jim Dennis watched the men mount the steps with grim precision. There was Death in their walk; he could sense it with that physician's instinct of his. The angels of Life and Death were flying over Fritz Schmidt's store.

But soon there would be only Death—unless he did something. And he knew that he couldn't do it, couldn't touch his little black bag, even though a dozen lives were at stake instead of the life of the boy whom the rivermen carried.

Fools like that younker had no busi-

ness getting into these drunken knife fights, Dennis thought rebelliously. Now let the dummy worry about his own troubles. Dennis had enough of his own. Besides, there was nothing he could do. Nothing.

Angrily, he turned away from the window, fighting hard to control the old helpless fury that had risen within him a half dozen times during the past year. A job like this would need skill, and hands—strong, steady hands. Doctor James Dennis's hands were, so far as surgery was concerned, paralyzed. He had nothing save a—

"Damn!" His nails were biting deep into flabby, sweaty palms. The skin across his cheekbones felt tight and hot. He shot a quick glance at Tod Winters, the big, broad-shouldered fellow who had boarded the *Nancy Lee* less than fifty miles up-stream, and had gotten off here at Fort Condon.

Winters had been drunk aboard the steamboat; he was still drunk, and getting drunker. But Dennis, looking at the girl beside Winters, conceded ungraciously that the rummy certainly knew how to pick his women.

"What's the matter, Doc?" Winters asked, tilting his glass. "That fight outside scare you?" He looked at Jim for a moment, then the heavy brows drew together in sudden suspicion. "You *are* a doctor, aren't you?"

Staring at him, Jim thought bitterly: *Why couldn't it have been him instead of me? Why did it have to be me who had to lose my hands? Me—me, Jim Dennis, of all people?*

A choking something clutched at his throat. He wanted to scream, to tell them not to bring that poor, knife-torn devil inside, that there was nothing he could do for him. But the words were only soundless voices in his mind. Instead, he heard himself saying in a dull flat voice, "I *was* a doctor," as he turned and watched the little group shove through the narrow doorway and into the store.

"Lay him on the counter," a tall, rawboned stoker ordered. "See if you can do anything for him—maybe a shot of whiskey. I'm goin' to hunt up that doc who came in on the *Nancy Lee*."

He turned, hurried toward the door. Jim watched him go, cursing himself for still carrying that tell-tale surgeon's bag. He was parading under false colors and he knew it. He wasn't a doctor anymore and the sooner he knocked all those cockeyed ideas out of his head the better. The minute he got out of the store he would sink that little bag and all his hopes with it in the muddy waters of the Missouri.

"Wait a minute!" Winters slapped his glass down on the table. "There's your doc over in that corner—by the window. Or maybe he isn't a doc; hell, I don't know. He talks kind of funny."

"Why didn't somebody say so?" the stoker snarled. "If Tom Stanton bleeds to death Miss Rachael, I reckon, will just about tie us all to the *Nancy Lee's* paddles, and—"

"My God! It's Tom!"

Rachael Stanton, who had been sitting with Winters, shoved back her chair with a strangled cry. She would have stumbled over to her brother on the counter, but Winters held her gently. For an instant she struggled frantically to break free. Then the dam broke, and burying her face on Winters' shoulder, she began to moan softly.

* * *

CONFUSED and angered, the stoker turned and bellowed to Jim, "There's a man bleeding to death on that counter, and you're the only doc in town—*if* you are a doctor! You going to stand by and let him die?"

Fighting down the resentment within

him Dennis said quietly, "Sorry, but there's nothing I can do."

An ominous mutter arose from the rivermen. Jim listened without resentment; he had gone through this thing many times during the past year. After a while he'd sort of gotten used to it.

For an instant the big stoker glared at him. Then: "Look, doc. I don't know where you hail from, and I don't give a damn. We don't ask questions here. But I *do* know this. Once it gits out that you stood by and let a man die when maybe you could have saved him, even from Sam Cleghorn's fancy knife, there ain't a place along the whole Missouri will have you."

Something snapped in Dennis. "And you get this," he clipped. "I've already told you there's nothing I could do—even if I wanted to. You'd better get another doctor while there's still time. That youngster is hemorrhaging internally!"

Cursing viciously, the stoker put his hands on Jim's chest and pushed. "You're the kind of sawbones Cleghorn needs here, all right," he rasped. "One that will let the people he knifes die without a chance! Yeah, that would suit Sam just fine; why, with a crew like you it wouldn't take him long to kill off all his opposition along the Missouri!"

Suddenly Dennis threw up his arms and started to let the stoker have one on the chin. Then, again, he saw his own hands. White faced, bitter, he let them drop limply to his sides and stood there, trying not to let the stoker sense the hurt, the humiliation in his heart.

He was conscious of Rachael Stanton's pitying gaze, and dull resentment glowed within him. He didn't want sympathy. That's what he had been trying to escape when he had left Kansas City. He wanted nothing except to be left alone.

Flat silence settled over the room—silence pregnant with the understanding of grim, hard-bitten men. Dully, Jim stared at those drawn, twisted claws that had once been surgeon's hands; hands that would never again hold a scalpel; never again give life where there was none.

"Hell, Doc," the stoker said awkwardly, "I don't reckon we understood." He spun and snapped to one of the men at the counter, "Git out and see if you can stir up that damned horse doctor. And move!"

"Hold it!" The drunken Tod Winters set down his glass with studied care and then said, very slowly, "I happen to be a doctor, too—after a fashion. Since our friend here obviously *can't* operate, I guess I'll have to! Frankly, I'm not so good on these internal cases—or in diagnosis—but if what's-his-name here will diagnose, I'll operate!"

Staggering a little, he rose from the table and made his way to the injured man. Dazed, Jim followed him, thinking bitterly of the poor devil's chances under the knife of a drunken, backwoods doctor. Yet, somewhere deep within him an incredible plan was beginning to form. A plan with a future. If only this man could handle a scalpel.

"Please!" Rachael's hand was on Jim's arm, and he was staring down into her frightened, tear-stained eyes. "Please. You will help him, won't you?"

Something in her voice—a soft note of understanding—angered him. "With these hands?" he laughed harshly.

She did not look at the twisted claws he held out before him, but rather into his eyes. He felt suddenly ashamed as he bent over the husky kid on the counter.

But he forgot shame, forgot everything save the haunting, helpless feeling that came over him at sight of the knife thrust. A quick diagnosis told him the whole story. Punctured spleen. Profuse internal hemorrhage.

While Winters rolled up his sleeves and scrubbed his hands in a pan of scald-

ing water from the Schmidt kitchen, Jim gave his diagnosis. Winters finished scrubbing his hands, let them dangle in the air until they dried, then said, "What do you think his chances are?"

Jim looked at him. "I don't think he has any," he said bluntly. What he really meant was that he didn't think Stanton had a chance under a drunken surgeon's knife. But as he watched Winters make that first incision he wasn't so sure.

And minutes later, sweat beading his white, strained face, he knew that he had just witnessed a miracle of surgery. For barring infection, Tom Stanton would live—would live because a flashing scalpel in the surgeon's hands of a drunken river doctor who knew almost nothing of diagnosis, and the brain of a man who had nothing left save that brain, had stolen him from Death.

"All right." Dennis turned wearily to Rachael. "You can have the men rig up a stretcher now and take him home. When he regains consciousness give him one of these pills every three or four hours. And let me know how he's getting along."

Smiling grimly, he tried to ignore the way in which she thanked him—a hasty, breathless rush of words, as though she were eager to get it over with. And he didn't miss the quick, glad manner in which she turned to Tod Winters. But then, what had he expected? After all, he was too old to dream.

Swaying a little with fatigue, he started for the door. Half way there the big stoker halted him. "Thanks, Doc," he said, his voice husky. "You see, I've sort of taken a shine to the kid." He thrust out a hairy fist, then dropped it suddenly, his face a brick red. "Sorry, Doc," he muttered, as Jim pushed through the door.

Just outside, Rachael and Winters caught up with him. "Just a minute, Doctor Dennis!" Rachael said. "My father will want to thank you for what you've done. Where will you be staying? Oh, and by the way, you too, Tod?"

Jim fought down the quick stab of pain that caught him at the familiar way in which she addressed Winters. If he carried out his wild dream he'd have to get used to that— and to other things.

"Why, I—I—" Winters fumbled helplessly for words.

"You can find us at the River House after seven every evening," Jim volunteered quickly, and thus mated a pair of hands and a brain. He had sensed that Winters was without funds, and had cut in to save him from an embarrassing situation. "Any other time from six to six I'll be here at the store."

"Here?" Rachael stared incredulously.

Despite himself, Jim felt a hot flush rise to his cheeks, and wondered whether he could ever get used to having to say what he was going to say now.

"Yes, Miss Stanton. I'm going to work here for Fritz Schmidt, in the store! Fritz is an old friend of mine!" Then turning, he stumbled blindly out into the rain and darkness. . . .

* * *

SHOULDERS back, Jim Dennis was whistling the next morning as he entered the lobby of the River House. Mentally, he felt better than he had in months, better, as a matter of fact,

Jim Dennis and Tod Winters had the courage that brought civilization to the raw frontier. You'll meet another great empire builder, in "Feud-Busters of the Steel Rail War," by Norrell Gregory, in the current issue of STAR WESTERN, The Big All-Novel Magazine!

than he had since that terrible day when paralysis, striking with brutal swiftness, had cut short what had promised to be a brilliant career.

And striding across the lobby to the desk, he realized that this change of mood was due to Tod Winters, the genius with a scalpel who had failed, ironically, because he could not diagnose! Winters, the man who had performed a major operation with a quart of whiskey in his veins!

It was all like an incredible dream. Last night, after Tod had taken Rachael Stanton home, he, Jim Dennis, the man without a surgeon's hands, and Tod Winters, a doctor minus a diagnostic brain, had formed a partnership. A bizarre union in which one man contributed his hands, the other his brain.

And now, strengthened by a confidence he had not known in months, Jim had the feeling that it was going to be an unbeatable combination. A combination that nothing could break up. Nothing except . . . frowning, he thought of the way Rachael Stanton had thrown herself into Tod Winters arms the night before, of the way she had turned to Tod Winters after the operation with her first thanks. Tod's personality had drawn the girl like a moth to a flame, incredible though it seemed, at their first meeting.

Irritated by the thought, he snapped to the desk clerk, "Any mail for Dennis—Jim Dennis?" Why shouldn't she give Winters credit? After all, hadn't it been Winters who had operated? He, himself, had done nothing more spectacular than—

"Sorry, Dennis," the clerk said. "Nothing today."

Something in the man's voice and the frightened shuttling of his eyes gave Jim his first warning of trouble. Slowly, masking the tenseness within him, Jim turned and stared at the giant of a man striding across the lobby toward him. Stared because he had never seen such a man as this before in his whole life.

His size was incredible, breath-taking. Six feet five or six, he must have weighed close to three hundred pounds, yet he moved with a lithe, almost cat-like grace. Jim felt his breath rasp harshly in his throat. The man was massive! There was no other word for it. Massive—and evil, he thought, looking into the hooded black eyes.

"So you're Dennis, the handless doctor, eh?" The giant thrust out a hairy paw, then suddenly checked himself, evidently remembering those hands. He said, "I'm Sam Cleghorn. Thought I'd come over and look you up. Been hearin' things about you all morning."

"Yes? What sort of things?" Jim asked quietly. He was thinking: So this is Sam Cleghorn, the fancy knife man! It seemed almost unbelievable that a man of Cleghorn's size should be a knife fighter. Most such men were rough-and-tumble fighters, exulting in sheer, brute strength.

"Well, for one," Cleghorn said, "I hear you saved Tom Stanton's life. That's too bad, Dennis. It means I'll have to do the job all over."

There was neither malice nor hatred in Cleghorn's voice, but simply a matter of factness that sent shivers crawling down Jim's spine.

"That's your affair," Dennis shrugged. "But you didn't come over just to tell me that."

For an instant Cleghorn studied him out of those strange, calculating eyes, and Jim had the feeling that the big man was sizing him up, evaluating him. Then Cleghorn smiled crookedly.

"You're right, Dennis," he said. "I've got something important on my mind. Something that might mean a lot of money to you—if you see things right." Shooting a quick glance at the desk clerk he said, "Let's go over here where we can talk."

Warily, Jim dropped into a chair and waited. He knew that something was coming, something that meant trouble.

Cleghorn rolled a quirly with slow deliberation, lit it, and tossed the match into a brass cuspidor. Then suddenly it came—this thing that Jim had been dreading.

* * *

"LOOK, Dennis," Cleghorn said harshly. "I don't like the idea of you and this fellow, Winters, staying on here. A doctor in Condon right now is sort of like a rattlesnake—he just ain't welcome! A young one tried it once, but—well, he didn't do so good. Took sick and died, sudden like. Thought maybe you'd be interested in knowing. You see, it just ain't profitable nor wise unless—"

"Unless?"

"Unless you want to string along with me," Cleghorn said softly. He dropped the cigarette on the floor, and ground it out beneath a heavy boot. "Look, Dennis. We might as well come out in the open with this thing. For years I've been cleaning up selling a cure-all medicine of my own to these local fools. Nothing but sweetened colored water, but they've gone for it. They're suspicious of sawbones; no faith in them.

"But now, after the way you and that fellow Winters pulled Stanton back from the grave they're beginning to wonder. You know, this "medicine" of mine naturally ain't been none too good for cures. First thing you know folks are likely to start going over to you. I ain't going to let anything like that happen, Dennis. Either you keep on with your plans to work in old Schmidt's store and take a fair cut on these sales, or you git out of town—and quick!"

Livid with anger, Jim came to his feet. "Why, you dirty—"

"Just a minute!" Cleghorn cut in. "Don't be a fool, Dennis. You got nothing to lose. Go on with this doctor angle if you want to. Then when folks begin to "die" sudden like, the town will blame it on that partner of yours—not on you. After all, he'll be the one that does the operating. Now, think it over before you blow off steam. And, by the way, I hear this Winters is getting along right well with old man Stanton's daughter."

"Listen, Cleghorn!" Jim gritted. "Keep Miss Rachael's name out of this. Who she chooses for her friends is her business. As for your proposition, Cleghorn—" Jim drew in a deep, quivering breath to try and control the fury within him—"you can take it and go to hell! Now get out of my way!"

As Jim passed Cleghorn laid a massive paw on his shoulder. "Just a minute, Dennis," he said softly. "If you or that partner of yours are in town this time next week—somethin's likely to happen to you!"

"We'll chance that, Cleghorn!" Jim snapped and strode past. However, standing on the porch outside, watching the heat waves shimmering down the street, he wondered if perhaps he hadn't stepped into something he would have best stayed out of. After all, he had no right to risk Tod Winter's life. . . .

That night he told Tod Winters about his run-in with Cleghorn.

"The dirty rat!" Winters growled, clenching his big hands. "He's got another idea coming if he thinks he can chase us out of Condon! I'm kind of beginning to like this place." He grinned and shot a quick glance at Rachael, who was sitting on the steps beside him.

Looking up suddenly, Jim caught the girl staring at him. "And what do *you* think of Condon, Doctor Dennis?" she asked softly.

Confused, angered by that mocking something in her eyes, Jim said abrupt-

ly, "I think it's a good place for Tod and I to get out of!"

Rising to his feet, he brushed the dust from his trousers and stood there a moment, silent. Finally he said, "However, if that's the way you feel about it, Tod, we'll stay. There's a lot of work waiting for good doctors here."

Before either Rachael or Winters could speak he strode down the walk and swung impatiently into the dusty street.

* * *

SAM CLEGHORN evidently had too many things on his mind the next few days to remember his treat in the River House lobby. Jim had seen him only once, and then from a distance. That time he had spotted the big man aboard a mail packet at the docks, selling some of his cure-all to a group of stokers. It must have been a good sale because Jim had learned that Cleghorn had a dozen or more river rats who did most of the selling.

However, Dennis found himself with more work to do than time in which to do it. After his talk with Tod Winters he had told Fritz Schmidt he would have to find a new clerk. Then he concentrated on his river town patients.

Not that they wanted administering to, Jim had one patient in those first three days. Two, counting Tom Stanton, were already out of danger and improving rapidly. The other was old Ard Stanton, Tom's and Rachael's father, who came to the office every day complaining of vague pains in his back.

Jim had a hunch that the owner of the *Nancy Lee* was merely trying to express his gratitude for his son's recovery. Whether he was right or not, those daily dollars kept him and Tod with full bellies.

On the fifth day after they had opened their office, Dennis-Winters had three patients. Cash patients. Working carefully, Jim diagnosed the cases—one of them serious. Cancer of the lips. After he had sent the man away, he sank into a chair and shook his head.

"That fellow will die," he said slowly. "Six months—even four months ago—I could have saved him. Now, it's too late."

"Advanced case, eh?" Winters queried.

"Yes," Jim snapped, rising from his chair. "He's been putting all his faith in Cleghorn's damned quackery. And he'll go back to it just because I told him something he didn't want to hear. We've seen the last of him."

But Dennis was wrong. Three hours later the man staggered into the office, his life's blood gushing out through a slashed throat.

"Good God, man!" Jim exclaimed, catching him as he fell. "What happened?"

Blood choked off the stranger's reply. He tried desperately to say something; his eyes rolled back until the whites gleamed. "Cleg—" His head rolled limply and Jim knew he was gone.

"Cleghorn, eh?" Winters snarled. "Just because he came to us." His face was white. Suddenly he straightened up and started slipping out of his blood-stained smock.

Uneasily, Jim looked up from the dead man. "Where are you going?"

Tod flung the smock over a chair back. "Out to kill me a coyote!" he said. He went over to his surgical kit and hauled out a well-oiled .45.

"Wait a minute, Tod!" Jim caught him by the arm. "You're not going out there and get a knife in your belly! Cleghorn's a damned bad hombre."

"So am I, when I get riled up," Winters grated. "That damned medicine show peddler isn't going to kill off my patients and get away with it!"

"You going to leave me in a hole, Tod?" Jim asked quietly. "Go out there

and get yourself killed off and I'm finished. You're my hands, Tod."

He hated himself for those words—hated Tod for forcing him to admit his helplessness. But he wasn't thinking of himself now. He was thinking of Tod and Rachael, and of their love for one another. Hell, he wasn't blind as well as paralyzed.

Half way to the door, Tod halted, his face going white. "I'd be letting you down if I didn't go out there after Cleghorn," he said quietly. "You and every suffering devil in Condon. They respect us now, Jim. Sooner or later we can build up a practice here. But let Cleghorn go around carving people up and he'll have them so scared they won't dare come to us. You know that."

Yes, Jim knew that. And it was the thing he would have done if he had had two good hands. Hysterical paralysis, hell! Did those fool colleagues of his in Kansas City think he'd let his best friend —his hands—go out and get himself killed if he could help it? They had said he could use has hands if he only wanted to badly enough. Well, he wanted to now more than anything else in the world—and he couldn't! Couldn't, except to. . . .

He was thinking of Rachael's happiness as he reached with fumbling, deadened fingers for the hypo syringe. Then suddenly he lunged forward, clutching at Tod's arm. A shot of morphine and even Tod wouldn't be fool enough to start out looking for Cleghorn.

Cat-like, Tod slipped aside, and carried forward by the momentum of his wild charge, Jim tripped over a low stool. He fell heavily, striking his head against an instrument cabinet. Everything went black. . . .

Soft hands were caressing his face. They were adjusting an ether cone. He didn't like the smell of ether; it always made him sick.

Instinctively, he thrust back imaginary covers, started to get up, Then suddenly he realized he wasn't in bed.

"Jim! Jim, listen to me! You've got to get up! Tod's down at the River House, hunting for Sam Cleghorn!"

Shaking his head, Jim stared at the blurred, wavering face bending over him. Then, as though by magic, the mists were gone, and he was staring up into Rachael Stanton's white face.

"The damned fool!" he muttered thickly. "I tried to stop him but tripped over something and knocked myself out!" Waves of weakness clutching at him, he staggered to his feet.

For a moment he stood there, acutely conscious of the fact that the girl beside him belonged to Tod Winters, and that Tod was out there now trying to get himself killed off. Suppose Cleghorn—it was an ugly thought; something that Jim realized was not worthy of the loyalty Winters had already shown him.

"Get the gun out of my case!"

"What are you going to do, Jim?" Rachael's face was suddenly scared.

"Go out and do the job for Tod," Jim said grimly. "I'll manage, somehow, to hold his sixgun, for a minute."

"Wait, Jim!" There was a breathless, intense note in Rachael's voice. Turning, he stared at her, puzzled, questioning. "Did it ever occur to you that—well, that I might not want either of you killed? Don't you see? Without you Tod couldn't do this surgery he's doing. And without Tod, you—you wouldn't do so well either, Jim."

Yes, she was thinking of Tod's future. He saw that she didn't want Jim Dennis killed off because it would rob her fiance of his diagnostic brain.

"Don't worry," he retorted. "I'll take care of myself!" Then he walked out.

Outside, fear strode with him every step of the way down the dusty street. He knew Tod—knew the unreasoning hatred the man had for "quacks." He

realized also that whatever Sam Cleghorn's many vices—cowardice was not one of the them. The man would meet the Devil in a knife fight any day of the week. With two people like that coming together hell was going to pop!

It had already popped, Jim realized a moment later. He could tell it by the gathering knot of people swarming around the River House. Hoarse yells, the taunting screams of blood-thirsty men urging their champion on gave him the whole bloody picture even before he spotted Tod Winters and Sam Cleghorn mixing it furiously in the dust-filled circle.

* * *

BLOOD streamed down Tod's face, but otherwise he seemed fresh enough. Cleghorn was breathing heavily, and Jim caught a trapped, desperate look in the big man's eyes.

But this was no finish fight, Jim realized angrily. Tod thrashing Cleghorn before all of Fort Condon wasn't going to solve their problem. Uneasily, he wondered what had happened to the gun Tod had carried with him from the office.

A smashing hook sent Cleghorn sprawling to the ground. He lay there a moment, panting, the dust of the street smearing his face. Then, before Winters could dodge, his hand streaked to the knife sheath at the back of his neck!

"For God's sake, Tod—his knife!" Jim screamed, lunging forward. Desperately, his hand stabbed to the gun in his pocket, jerked it forth, pulled the trigger all in one continuous, jerky motion.

Like a flash, Cleghorn's knife arced through the air, and Winters staggered back, gasping, the hilt of the knife protruding from his chest.

With incredible swiftness, Cleghorn spun toward Jim, his arm jerking back once more. Crazed with the shock of seeing Tod fall, Jim pulled the trigger until the hammer fell with a flat click on empty cylinders. He was barely conscious of Cleghorn's blade slicing through the air near him; remembered only vaguely seeing the big man go down slowly.

Hurling the .45 aside, Jim pushed through the little knot of rivermen gathered about Winters. Then suddenly he paused, shock splashing over him like icy water. *His hands! He had used his hands! He had killed Sam Cleghorn!*

Laughing crazily, he shoved through the crowd, new hope, new confidence welling up inside of him. Tod was alive; he somehow sensed that even before he saw him.

But bending over Tod, all that egotism drained swiftly away, leaving him desperate—feeling more helpless than at any time during his life. Winters was dying—dying with a knife thrust through his heart! He should, as a matter of fact, have been dead minutes ago.

For an instant Jim knelt there, sweat beading his face, his hands twisting, flexing themselves with indecision. He knew just as surely as though the chest wall were already opened that Tod was hemorrhaging inside. Pretty soon the blood would smother out all life.

White faced, he ran trembling hands through his hair. There was no use kidding himself. There *was* a chance—a bare chance—that he could save Tod Winters. Give him back to Rachael.

"All right, some of you men," Dennis barked. "Get him inside the lobby, quick!"

In the cool darkness of the hotel, hands fumbling uncertainly with their new found freedom, he looked at Tod lying over there on an improvised operating table. He paused, rubber glove half on. He was a fool to do this thing, he thought rebelliously. A fool to risk the reputation he had already begun to build up here—to deliberately throw Tod back into Rachael's life.

Slipping on the glove, he picked up a

scalpel and dipped it into a pan of boiling water someone had brought. For an instant he held the bright blade up to the light.

A fool! His hands were still stiff, uncertain, and this operation would be the most delicate he had ever performed. A single slip—even of a thousandth of an inch—would be fatal. And with Tod's death would die all the confidence the people of Fort Condon had built up in one Jim Dennis.

Abruptly, he dropped the scalpel back into the water. He wouldn't do it. He didn't have to. There had been a lot of excitement out there; several people had taken a shot at Cleghorn. Probably no one had even noticed him using his hands. It was simple. He's tell them he couldn't operate. They all knew about his hands. As a matter of fact—he couldn't help shivering at the thought—as a matter of fact there was more than an even chance that this use of his hands *was* only temporary. Perhaps he would soon be the handless doctor again. But he had to forget that.

He turned briskly on the crowd. "All right, clear out! You may think you're tough but this would make you sick!"

Reluctantly, they left, leaving him with a dark-haired girl as his assistant. He flashed a quick glance into Rachael's white face and knew what she must be going through.

"Scalpel!" he snapped, and wondered vaguely that he received it so soon. Then he forgot everything.

With steady hand he made the first incision. . . .

* * *

LATER—much later—he raised his head and wiped the sweat from his face with trembling hands. For the first time he became aware of the terrific strain under which he had been working; of the stifling heat of the room; of the weak, sick feeling in the pit of his stomach.

But then he had a right to feel any damned way he chose, he defended himself. He'd just taken a man's heart out, patched it, and put it back in again—ticking. He wondered what his Kansas City colleagues would think if they could have seen that.

"Tod!" Rachael Stanton's voice was unsteady.

Abruptly, Jim jerked back to the present, stared up into the girl's white face. "He'll live," he said shortly, slipping off the rubber gloves. "Probably have to remain in bed for a couple of months."

Then seeing the crestfallen look on her face, he added, "But don't let that worry you. You can make it a bedside ceremony!" He tried desperately to inject some humor into the words, but there was little humor in his heart. Only stark misery.

"You idiot! You darned idiot!" Rachael's soft arms were around him, and he was staring down into her dark eyes in amazed, incredulous wonder. "Just *who* do you think I'm going to marry?"

Still unable to believe what his heart told him, Jim stood there, dazed. Finally he managed, "Why, Tod, of course. What do you think I saved him for?"

"To be best man at your wedding, you fool!" Tod Winters chuckled weakly from the operating table. "Ain't you got sense enough to know when a girl's proposing to you?"

Jim only half heard him, for looking into Rachael's smiling eyes he was thinking that with this girl and this friend he'd carve a place among the river folks. He looked down at the strong, brown fingers.

Yes, he reflected, with these two cured hands!

Hell On

CHAPTER ONE

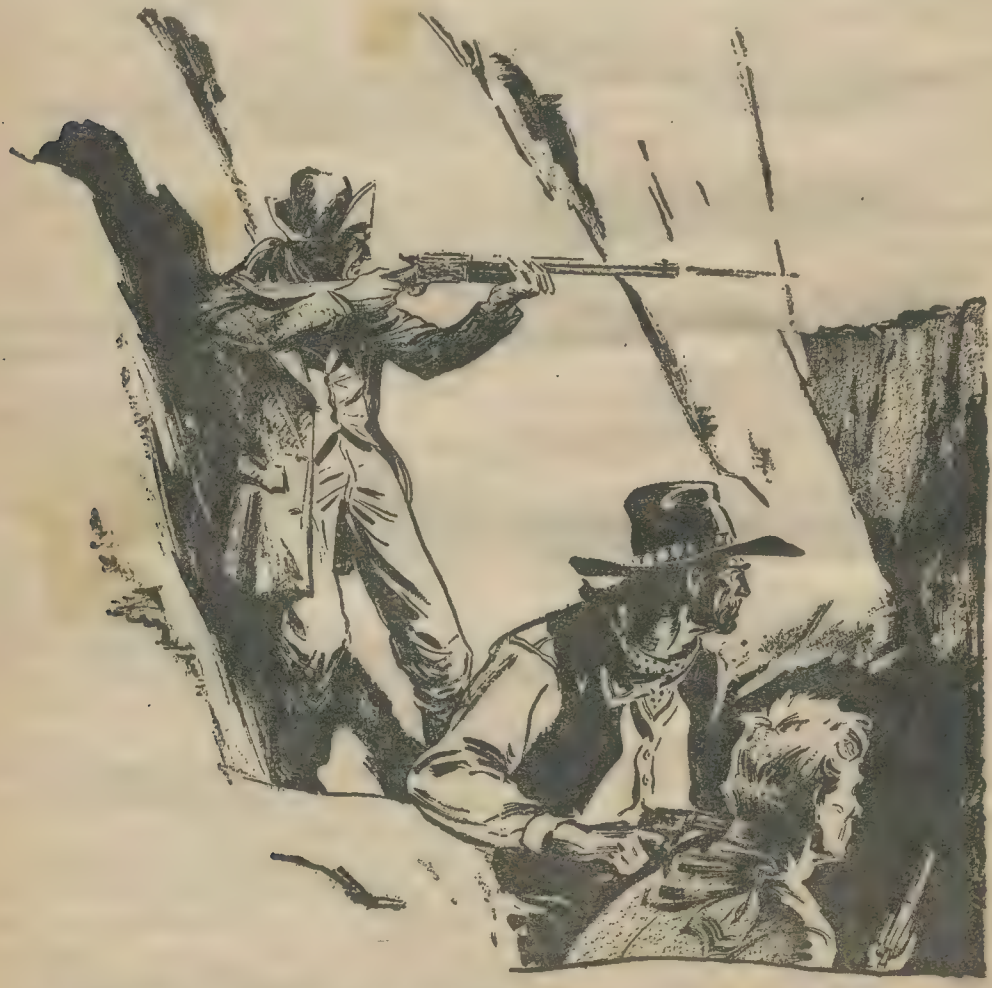
Four Tough Hombres Ride Again

THE four Jeppson brothers came riding down the narrow trail from Bearcat Mountain. Ferd was in the lead. Ferd was the button and the runt. He stood a bare six feet two inches, and weighed a meager two hundred and three pounds.

Behind Ferd came Threepwood and Kipp, the twins, six feet three and a half, two hundred and eighteen and a half pounds each.

The towering Kronk brought up the rear, his six feet, five-inch length slouched indolently, his lank two hundred and forty pounds at ease in the saddle.

The brothers rode in their usual volubility. Kronk said nothing. Threepwood



A graybeard's shotgun trap roped the four tough Jeppson brothers into a fool's gun-crusade against the curly wolf legion of Bearcat Bend—a town whose main industry was the making of tombstones for fighting hombres who spat in the face of Boothill's Gods!

Bearcat Mountain

A two-fisted novelette of mountain fighters

By ELI COLTER

said the same. Kipp said even less. Ferd, the noisy one of the outfit, poked his thumb into the mouth of a wildcat he carried under one arm, and grunted at the result.

After a three-week pasear on the mountain top, the Jeppsons looked almost as tough as they really were. They were all bearded and dusty. They were all ragged and scarred with the marks of battle.

Kronk wore several claw welts on his leathery cheeks, mementoes of an en-

Kronk peered around his boulder, and his sharp gaze picked out the silhouette of a high-crowned hat.

counter with a grizzly. Rents in the clothes of the twins, and jagged scratches on their arms bore witness to their foray into a cave after the catamount that had killed their two hounds. They had promptly dispatched the cat, and sworn relief that they'd left the other three hounds at home. From the look of Ferd, the subdued wildcat he carried hadn't given in without a struggle.

Taking it by and large, the brothers had enjoyed a lusty and typically Jeppsonian holiday from the monotony of the ranch. And though the outing had proved a trifle tame for their hardy taste, they were content and at peace with the world.

They were not looking for trouble at present. They had no idea that trouble of no minor sort was waiting for them around the next bend of the trail. Not that it would have slowed them up any, had they known. They probably would have ridden a little faster to meet it. They loved trouble.

Just ahead, the trail took a hairpin turn to the left. They rounded the bend—and ran squarely into the forbidding muzzle of a 10-gauge shotgun.

Behind the gun was a man on a horse. The horse was scrawny and flea-bitten and sorrel. The man was lean and wizened and bald. He was also hatless, and his eyes held a look of death. His calloused thumb snapped back the triggers of the gun. His flat voice rasped at the Jeppson brothers.

"Reach!" he bawled. "Throw down your irons or I'll blow you into next week!"

It's hard saying what the wizened little gent expected. But he never expected what happened. Probably he never quite realized what happened. It happened too fast.

Not a word passed among the four brothers, but their teamwork was as startling as it was violent.

Ferd gripped the wildcat about the middle, whirled it over his head, and let fly. The wildcat yowled and bawled, clawed wildly with all four paws, and lit squarely on the belligerent little gent's head.

In the same breath, Kronk threw his lank body forward. His leathery paw shot out with the speed of a striking snake and snatched the shotgun from the stranger's grasp. Nobody could say how Kronk's horse suddenly got up there beside Ferd's. The Jeppsons did things that way.

The shotgun roared impotently as Kronk twisted the twin barrels upward. Kronk braced the gun barrels against his saddlehorn, flexed his shoulders, and bent the stout barrels almost double.

He tossed the gun back with accurate aim, so that the bent barrels caught over the wizened fellow's knee, and hung there.

"Have a gun," Kronk invited politely. "What was you goin' to say, mister?"

* * *

BY THIS time the wildcat, having administered a few gouges, and having let out more raucous howls, had leaped to the ground and gone away from there. The stranger sat in his saddle, motionless, staring, the bent gun hanging on his lax knee, blood oozing from the scratches on his bald head. He was evidently paralyzed.

Behind Kronk, Kipp whipped the lariat from his saddle and began fashioning a hangman's noose with the neatness and dexterity of much practice. He spoke to Threepwood, as he nudged his huge gray gelding forward.

"Pick a likely lookin' tree, Threep. We'll string this maverick up by his horns in a jiffy."

"Hold yore jaw, Kipp!" Kronk boomed.

Just then the stranger moved. But not in the way anyone would have expected him to move.

He turned quite white, to the top of his bald head, which made the cat scratches

stand out red and raw. He swayed in the saddle, lurched to one side, and pitched to the ground.

The brothers nudged their mounts forward, amazement on their bearded faces.

Ferd pointed at the crimson stain on the back of the fallen man's shirt. "Hell! The pore little jigger's been plugged!"

Kronk unwound his long length and stepped to the ground, dropping on one knee at the little man's side. With one twist of his big hand, he ripped away the faded blue denim.

He frowned at the long gash, then drew a breath of relief and glanced up at his three brothers, who sat their saddles in silence, awaiting his orders.

"Bullet didn't go in much," Kronk informed them. "Hit him sidlin' like. Ferd, fetch some water. Ketch up his horse for him, Kipp. You give me a hand, Threep."

Ferd turned his horse toward the stream, which ran along the bed of the gully they had been descending. Kipp spurred his mount up the trail to corner the little man's flea-bitten sorrel, which had backed and shied away in fright when the wounded man had pitched to the ground. Threep dismounted and drew close to Kronk.

"What you want me to do, Kronk?" Threep said.

Kronk stood up and glanced about. Off to the right there lay a wide bench. A small pond occupied about half of the bench, its stale, muddy, green-scummed water unfit for any man's use.

But the area surrounding the pond was flat and padded deep with lush green grass. Three spreading trees fed by the stagnant waters offered cool shade.

Kronk gestured toward the bench and the spreading trees.

"Shag our nags over there into the shade, Threep. I'll carry this little tyke over and lay him out comfortable."

By the time Threepwood had tethered his horse and Kronk's under one tree, Kronk had the little man stretched on the grass in the shade of another. Ferd had come back with his hat full of water from the clear, cool creek. Kipp was leading the flea-bitten sorrel up to the tree where Threepwood had the other two horses tied.

Kronk looked up at Ferd, from where he sat on his heels in the grass beside the small stranger. Without a word he reached for the hat, and without a word Ferd turned it over to him.

Kronk scooped up a handful of the cool water, trickled some into the little man's half-open mouth, and splashed the rest of the handful on the bald forehead, washing away the blood from the cat scratches. The little man gulped and swallowed, stirred and moaned, but that was all.

Kronk repeated the process.

At the third handful, the little man opened his eyes, and stared up at Kronk in dazed gratitude.

"Thank ye kindly, brother," he said shakily. "Excuse me for jumpin' you that-away. But—but I thought you must be some of Haley's gang. You all looked so damned tough."

* * *

KRONK grinned appreciation of the compliment, and patted the little man on the shoulder. "That's okay, mister. Jest you lay quiet for a spell and git yore wind. You ain't hurt bad. Reckon you kind of konked out from losin' a little blood and ridin' in the heat."

"Yeah. Reckon so." The little man's eyes held on Kronk's bearded face. "But you cain't be them fellas, any of you. Or you wouldn't be helpin' me now. That ain't their caliber. Their caliber is shootin' in the back. Who're you?"

"We're the Jeppsons," Kronk answered promptly. "From Fair Haven ranch. Old Jeeter Jeppson's kids."

A flicker of warmth lighted the little man's eyes. "Why, hell, I knowed old

Jeeter! Knowed him well. Didn't you never hear him speak of Piney Peters?"

Kronk frowned, striving to remember. "Hmmm. Seems summat like I do. Ain't shore."

"Old Jeeter knowed so many people we never heered tell of," Threepwood put in.

"I reckon he mighta." Piney closed his eyes. "Him and me . . . years ago. Done had a claim together. I got discouraged. Throwed it up."

"Hell," said Ferd, who had just come up, "was that the claim he made his money outta? The money he bought the Fair Haven with?"

"Yep." The little man's voice was a whisper. "Reckon so. He made plenty outen it. Wanted to divide it with me. I wouldn't take none. Didn't have it comin'. I'd throwed up, hadn't I? So I—I reckon. . . ."

His voice failed utterly, and he lay still again.

"Jest konked out ag'in," Kronk said. "Let him rest. He'll be all right in a few minutes."

"What you goin' to do with him?" Ferd demanded.

Kronk stared. "Why, leave him layin' out here for the cattymounts and polecats to chaw on, of course. What'd you think I'd do with him, him bein' a one-time pal of old Jeeter? Didn't think I was goin' to wet-nurse him none, did you?"

Ferd started to answer, but failed to get the words out of his mouth.

Another voice sounded behind them. None of them had heard any approach for a fairly good reason. The newcomer had left his horse back on the trail, and had advanced toward the bench afoot, over the padding of thick green grass.

His voice came to their ears, almost gloating with satisfaction. "Good afternoon, gents. I see you got the dirty claim-jumper."

Kronk came up like an abruptly released coil spring, twisting about as he rose. The other three brothers turned as one.

The newcomer stood a few feet away, surveying them. He was a well-built man, and he wasn't dressed as the Jeppson brothers were accustomed to seeing men garbed, in levis and flannel shirts and bull-hide chaps, like themselves. Or even like old Piney Peters, in faded bib dungarees and denim shirt. To the Jeppsons, he looked like something out of a book.

No. This man was wearing immaculate black whipcords and shiny ebony riding boots. His face was adorned by a full jet-black beard, with a mustache to match. His brows were heavy and jutting. The eyes beneath those brows were as black as hair and beard. His hat was an expensive black Stetson. He carried a short bullwhip in one hand.

Kronk blinked and stared. "Well, I'll be damned! What you won't see when you ain't got a gun! Where the hell did you come from?"

Kronk wasn't without a gun, as his speech might indicate. Like his brothers, he wore two big heavy weapons on belts crossed about his waist. But the stranger saw fit to ignore the fact.

He smiled pleasantly at Kronk's question. "Why, I came from the other side of Bearcat Mountain. I've been after Peters for two weeks."

"The hell you say!" Kronk glowered and took a step forward. "Meanin', I reckon, that you think you've got him now."

The dark man shifted on his feet and backed a pace. "Why, certainly. He jumped my claim."

Kronk thrust out his lantern jaw and scowled. The brothers crowded close at Kronk's elbows. Kronk growled and spat deliberately from one corner of his big mouth.

"That's a hell of a note. We cain't have nothin' like that goin' on," he said in a surly voice.

THE stranger smiled, showing big even teeth, as white as porcelain. "Ah, of course not!" he said. "I thought you wouldn't approve, when you learned what Piney'd been up to."

"Hell no, we don't approve!" Kronk boomed. "When there's any claim-jumpin' done on Bearcat Mountain, the Jeppson boys does it, stranger. We don't aim to stand for no interferin'."

The dark man looked startled. "And who are the Jeppson boys?"

"You're lookin' at 'em, fella," Ferd said.

The dark man turned white with fury. "You mean you birds have already located and filed on the ledge old Peters stole from me?"

"Sartain shore we have!" Threepwood confirmed. "And I don't reckon you calc'late to do much about it. It'd be right onhealthy pastime for a gent o' yore kidney."

The dark man's face turned from white to a violent crimson. His black eyes glittered with hate. His right hand flashed backward, and up. Manifestly, his intent was to slash the thong of the bullwhip across Kronk's face.

Kronk's bull-throated roar echoed over the bench and down the side of Bearcat Mountain. His horny right shot out, wrenched the quirt free from the dark man's grip, and sent the whip sailing through the air. Kronk's just-as-horny left also shot out, and snagged the dark man by his thick black beard. Kronk's iron-hard fingers gripped the beard with vicious strength as Kronk heaved and lifted and swung.

The dark man's body rose from the earth as if on the arm of a derrick. It prescribed a perfect arc and went sailing. Arms and legs flailing helplessly, the dark man soared over the clump of huckleberry bushes at the edge of the muddy pond. He hit the dirty water with a violent and highly gratifying splash, and sank out of sight into the filthy scum-filled depths.

The Jeppsons stood motionless, watching with expressionless eyes, till the man came to the surface and clawed his way to the grassy bank. He did not much resemble the immaculately-clad stranger of a few moments ago.

His hat was gone. He dripped and oozed green scum and foul black mud from head to foot.

Kipp started toward his horse, where the hangman's noose still dangled from his saddle. "Pick a likely tree, Threep!"

"Hold yore jaw, Kipp," Kronk said curtly.

Kipp glowered in exasperation. "Hell, ain't I never goin' to git a chance—"

"Well, not this time you ain't, anyway!" Kronk snapped. "Shut yore trap."

"Better luck next time," Threepwood leered.

Kronk ignored them. He fixed his gaze on the bedraggled man turning back toward the trail from the dirty pond. "And you hit the breeze with yore tail draggin', hombre! Ain't no room for jiggers like you on Bearcat Mountain. Beat it, and don't come back."

"Yaaah!" Ferd elaborated. "Next time we ketch you around these parts, we'll show you some *new* tricks."

The man did not look back. He stamped away, speechless with fury, striving vainly to clear his face and eyes of the clinging, stinking mud.

Threepwood glanced at Kronk. "Why the hell wouldn't you let us stretch his neck for him?"

"Reckon he shore had it comin'," Kronk admitted. "But you know, and I know, that no pal of old Jeeter ever jumped no man's claim."

"Shore do," Threepwood agreed. "And that hyena what jest crawled outen the pond ain't goin' to flag it none. He's goin' to hang around till hell freezes, now."

"Reckon Kronk jest done made shore of that," Ferd said dryly. "What you

figure, Kronk?" he asked very slowly.

"I figure if we let that gent alone and keep an eye out, he'll lead us to the lion's den. That's what. Not that I got any hankerin' to lay out pretty the skunks that shot old Piney in the back. Jest that we come up here for a little amusement, and damn me if we ain't goin' to have it, or know why!"

CHAPTER TWO

The Wolves of Bearcat Bend

PINEY PETERS opened his eyes again and stared around. "Water," he mumbled. "Kin I have some more water?"

"Shore can, old-timer!" Kronk dropped on one knee beside Piney and reached for Ferd's hat, still lying there with the crown half full of clear creek water. "Then we're hittin' the trail for the ranch."

"You takin' me to yore ranch, boy?"

"Shore am, Piney. Pronto. After we git some good grub under yore belt, we'll all do a little plottin'. There was a friend of yourn here a minute ago, while you was layin' dead to the world."

"A friend of mine?" Piney stared harder, and tried to sit up. "Where is he?"

Kronk grinned and winked at Ferd. "Why, he done jest went back up Bearcat Mountain. To take a look at a claim us boys jumped this mornin'. Don't ast no more questions now, Piney. We got some travelin' to do . . . ."

Piney Peters allowed Kronk to help him to his flea-bitten sorrel and into the saddle. Which, seeing the spirit of Piney Peters, argued to the Jeppson boys that the old man was worse off than they had realized. Must be something more wrong with him than a little bullet gash across the back.

None of the brothers said anything about it. But they watched Piney closely all the way to the Fair Haven ranch, and exchanged frequent puzzled glances. Several times the old man almost fell off his horse.

Not till they finally reached the home spread did they discover why old Piney was so played out. He'd been guarding his claim against interlopers for nearly two weeks, day and night, and he was half dead for sleep. So Kronk made him stretch out on a bed and sleep for hours, before he'd let old Piney do any talking.

Then, the story Peters told made the brothers' fingers itch for their guns.

"That there black-haired fella," Piney said, "the one you called a friend of mine. He's Black Haley. Head of one of the little gangs."

"How many little gangs is there, Piney?" Ferd asked.

"Oh, must be six or eight of them little gangs, son. Each gang numberin' from about four to six men. They all form the one big gang, which is run by Bignose Breedon. And he don't make no bones about it, neither!"

"Bignose Breedon?" Kronk queried. "Never heard of him. Where's he hang out?"

"In the Fidler's Bight Saloon, which he done owns. In that hell town of Bearcat Bend. You must of heered o' Bearcat Bend!"

Ferd nodded. "Yeah. We've heered of it. That's about all. It bein' so far away on the other side of Bearcat Mountain, we ain't never ranged over there."

"Well, it's a damned good place to stay away from!" Peters sat up on the bed, evidently feeling considerably stronger after his long sleep. "You boys think you're tough, and I reckon you air so, bein' old Jeeter's kids. But them wolves in Bearcat Bend'd make you look like buttons in short pants."

"Done heered it was plenty hell-fire over to Bearcat Bend," Kronk admitted mildly. "Never was much interested. Sech reports is usually exaggerated summat."

"Exaggerated!" Piney sighed. "Listen. It's built right in Cattymount Gulch, all along one street. Gulch is too narrer for more'n one street."

"And the farther you go up the gulch the tougher it gits," Threepwood said.

Piney nodded his bald head. "You said it, son. They do say as how, at the far end of the gulch, the air's so thick with flyin' lead that it takes a strong man to git enough air to breathe. And the Fidler's Bight Saloon is the last buildin' up the gulch."

* * *

"I'M GITTIN' interested in the town for the first time," Kronk said. "Does all of Breedon's gang hole in at the Fidler's Bight?"

"All on 'em. That's their headquarters."

"I suppose they run the whole damn town, though," Kipp put in hopefully.

Piney eyed him. "They do so. And they don't take nothin' from nobody. Ain't been a lawman near that town since it was built. And that's only half of it. Ain't no lawman fool enough ever to go there. The outlaws has got it, and the outlaws kin keep it."

"And these little gangs what makes up the big gang," Kronk asked, "go sneakin' around the hills, robbin' prospectors that's made a strike? Is that it?"

"Yep," Piney answered. "Robbin' anybody else that's handy and worth robbin', too. Then they hike back to Bearcat Bend with their loot, where they know everybody's afraid to foller."

The twins looked at Ferd, and Ferd made a wry face at the twins. Then all three looked at Kronk.

Before any of them could speak, old Piney said to Kronk, "Say, here I been gabbin' away like all git out, and I ain't even got the names of you kids straight yit."

Kronk pointed. "Them's the twins, Threepwood and Kip. That's Ferd, the button. I'm Kronk."

"Kronk!" Piney repeated. "That's what I thought they called you. Feared my ears was goin' bad. Where'd you ever git a name like that?"

Kronk grinned. "When I was borned, old Jeeter took one look at me and said I didn't look like nothin' human. So he named me Kronk, right on the spot."

"He's a damn liar," Ferd said. "It's short for Kronkheit, which was Ma's name afore she married old Jeeter. Where's this here claim of yourn, Piney?"

"Yeah. Tell it out clear," Kronk advised. "So we kin find it easy. We done wasted enough time already."

"You goin' up there?" Piney stared. "What fer? Ain't no use."

"Didn't you say you'd got the sylvanite all dug and piled up in yore tunnel?" Kronk demanded. "We're goin' after it."

Piney sighed heavily. "It won't be there, son. Wasn't so much. Jest a small vein. A few thousand dollars. It was a lot to me, though. All I'd ever want. It'll be gone now. Black Haley's gang'll have every ounce of it toted away long afore you could git there."

"Mebbe-so," Kronk returned calmly. "We got to take a chancet on that. If they have, I reckon we kin foller the trail to Bearcat Bend."

Piney was instantly aghast. His voice quavered. "No!" he bleated. "I won't tell you where the claim is! You don't dast go to Bearcat Bend. Them hellions'd mow you down like nothin'. It'd be plumb, plain suicide."

"Reckon we'll take a chancet on that, too, Piney." Kronk's voice was dry. "You might's well tell us where the claim is. If you don't, we'll go anyway, and that'll be a damn sight harder for us."

"But I can't let old Jeeter's kids in for nothin' like that—"

"You ain't lettin' old Jeeter's kids in

for nothin'," Kronk cut him short. "We're jest goin' after yore ore for you."

"But, I tell you, it's no use. You can't go. I won't let you go!"

Kronk laughed. "Peppery little jigger, ain't he, Ferd? Listen, Piney. You lay here and take it easy. Booby Jock, our hired man, he'll look arter you. And you stop worryin' and doubtin'. Tain't seemly, you doubtin' old Jeeter's kids."

Piney subsided, knowing when he was licked in an argument. His old eyes grew a little feverish. "If you could git that ore, son, I could mebbe cart it to the smelter and sell it off. Then buy me the little ranch I been hankerin' for all my borned days. Like old Jeeter done!"

"We'll git the ore, old-timer." Kronk stood up and stretched his big body to its towering height. "We'll git it, and we'll bring it back if we have to plug every damn wolf in Bearcat Bend. All we want to know is how to find that claim. How do we git thar?"

CHAPTER THREE

Black Haley's Gang

AN HOUR later the four brothers were headed back into the hills. They left Peters sitting at the kitchen table, eating a substantial meal Threepwood had cooked, with old Booby Jock to keep him fit company.

With orders for Piney to stay put till they returned, and with Booby's solemn promise to see that Piney didn't set foot off the ranch, the Jeppsons departed in high glee.

They could depend on Booby Jock. So they took to the hills with consciences easy, in eager determination to see through to the finish an affair which promised to be the toughest assignment they had ever tackled in all their young lives.

Piney's directions had been meager, but accurate. The Jeppson boys had no trouble in finding the short tunnel which led into Piney's mine, when they arrived at the place two days later. But they also found that Piney Peters had guessed right.

The heap of ore was gone. Nothing was left of it but a few scattered bits against one wall on the tunnel floor, where the stuff had been piled.

Kronk looked down at the ravished spot in the light of the pine torch he carried, and shrugged. Then he glanced at his brothers, his brows raised in a significant grimace.

"Well, nothin' to do but trail 'em," he said slowly. "They'll have the ore on pack horses, and likely they'll take it kind of easy on the way to Bearcat Bend. Reckon we kin ketch up with 'em without strainin' ourselves none. Hit the breeze, boys!"

They went back to their horses, stopped long enough to eat a meal from the cooked food they'd brought in their saddlebags, then started out on the rough, narrow trail that led to the outlaw town beyond the mountain.

"What we got to do now is make time," Kronk said suddenly, after they had been on the way for a scant half hour. "We kin ketch 'em easy before they reach Bearcat Bend. Accordin' to Piney, it's a three-day ride from the mountain to the town, by the trail, and they got to stick to the trail on account of a horse cain't git through the brush. Which is all water over the wheel."

"Hell, they only got a two-day start," Ferd said. "And them with pack critters. We kin go three times as fast as they kin, and we ain't doin' no stoppin' to sleep or cook. Nothin' to it."

"Nope," Kronk agreed. "There ain't, at that. So all of you can the chin music and git goin'."

From there on, four horses sped along the Bearcat trail in a long, easy lope,

slowing only a little when the night shadows fell, stopping only now and then to rest and blow. Then on, easy and steady through the night, as the moon came up and the darkness waned, and the dawn streaked the sky.

Kronk called an hour's halt then to feed and water the horses, and the brothers made another attack on the cooked food in the saddlebags.

Late that afternoon they came upon fresh sign, and Kronk swore in satisfaction. The sign told of four pack horses and eight men. At Ten Mile Creek they found the spot where the bandits had camped. The ashes of the campfire were still warm.

Kronk waved a hand toward the trail ahead. "We're goin' to make time now, boys," he said. "We got to ketch 'em before they reach that switchback in the trail which Piney was tellin' us of."

For the next few hours the brothers dogged the trail at high speed, and the sun was low in the sky when they caught a glimpse of their quarry through the trees ahead.

They also saw the two old lightning-blasted pines where the trail described a sharp bend to the left, entering upon the big horseshoe turn.

"See that?" Kronk said. "We ketched 'em jest right. They're jest swingin' into the switchback. Light and travel, hombres."

"What you goin' to do?" Ferd demanded. But he got off his horse as he spoke.

Kronk grinned, winked, then gestured toward the mountain slope dead ahead of them.

"Git yore wits to workin', button," he rasped. "The trail follows the grade of the canyon for seven miles to the east, Piney said. Then it turns back sharp ag'in for about seven and a half miles. Makin' a thumpin' big U. You remember Piney said that?"

"Yeah, shore. What about it?"

By now the twins were afoot, and had drawn closer to Kronk and Ferd.

Kronk's grin turned dry. "We're leavin' our nags here, and cuttin' across the mountain, afoot, button. Across the open end of the U."

Threepwood let out a subdued whoop. "By damn, if that ain't a good one! While they're doin' about fifteen mile of hard ridin', we'll be makin' a easy three-four mile on shank's horses through the brush."

"And we'll hit the trail several miles ahead of 'em," Kipp put in.

Kronk nodded. "And be waitin' to take 'em when they come. So tie yore nags outta sight, like I'm goin' to do, and let's get goin'. It ain't goin' to be no cinch breakin' our way through. But we kin do 'er."

In a short time they had their mounts tethered out of sight in the shade, and were on their way.

* * *

KRONK had told the truth. It was no cinch breaking their way through the brush, over logs and among boulders. An ordinary traveler might easily have lost his way and gone in circles.

But the Jeppsons knew the hills. They knew how to take advantage of every small clear space and every down log lying parallel to their course. And to have lost their sense of direction while sun or moon or stars were in the sky would have been a thing too shameful for a Jeppson to live down.

They went up that mountain slope like a pack of hounds, Ferd in the lead, the twins just behind him, and the towering Kronk bringing up the rear.

But for all their hardihood, the grueling going slowed them, and by the time they reached the trail at the other end of

the horseshoe on the other side of the mountain, the sun was low in the sky—and the eight riders with their small pack train of Piney's ore were already in sight.

Ordinary men of more cautious breed would have picked a likely spot to ambush the pack train with its eight-man guard, and settled down to wait.

But the Jeppsons were neither ordinary nor cautious; they wouldn't have ambushed the devil himself, and they'd never been known to wait calmly for trouble when they could see it coming. So they merely paused a minute to get their wind, and loosen the sixguns on the crossed belts at their hips.

Then Kronk said in a subdued boom, "Okay. Let 'er roll!" And he started down the trail at a high trot toward the pack train.

The robber gang might have been half expecting pursuit from behind, but it certainly wasn't looking for four tough jiggers to come rushing down the road to meet it.

The maneuver surprised them to such an extent that they barely had time to break and take cover, leaving the pack animals plodding along the trail. The advance guard drove them to shelter.

That lone guard saw the Jeppsons coming and he wheeled back to snap the information to the other seven. All eight of them rushed into the brush and scrub timber at the edge of a small meadow. The meadow was about sixty yards wide, roughly circular.

The trail ran straight across the little meadow, and anyone on that open spot would be a perfect target. The meadow was littered with rock. The brothers emerged from a thicket of willow along the creek, and started across the meadow. What warned them, none of them could have told. Some slight movement in that patch of scrub timber. The quickly choked off snort of a horse.

As though blown down by a high wind, the four brothers dived for protecting boulders just as the gunfire opened up from the thicket.

As the four Jeppsons threw themselves flat in the dirt, their guns blasted an answering challenge. A savage curse gave evidence that some of their bullets had gone home.

Kronk peered around his boulder, and his sharp gaze picked out the silhouette of a high-crowned hat, black against the lowering sun. He sighted at it and squeezed trigger. The hat fell from view, and the head that held it up fell with it.

Already, in those first few minutes, the odds against the four Jeppsons were lowered.

The sun was sinking fast. The taller trees in the thicket protecting the bushwhackers cast long, dark shadows into the rocky little meadow.

Kronk scowled. This called for speed. He called softly to his brothers: "Another few minutes and we won't be able to see nothin'. Up and at 'em!"

As one, the four reared from behind their sheltering boulders. Too long they had realized the value of surprise attack to doubt its success now. Too often had they come through at appalling odds, just because they hit hard when the other fellow wasn't looking for them to strike first. Such tactics had become their religion.

They bent low and charged across the boulder-strewn meadow at a breakneck pace, four braces of sixguns spouting lead at all animate things remaining in that thicket. The defiant crash of answering fire spewed from the thicket.

A bullet plucked at Ferd's shirt. Another ripped across Kronk's cheek. The brothers charged on. A head appeared for an instant from behind the bole of a tree. Ferd's right-hand gun smacked the outlaw down.

The brothers cleared the last five yards of meadow in a long, flying leap, plunged

through brush and trees to arrive squarely in the center of startled confusion. Rearing horses, frenzied men, and yammering guns.

* * *

KRONK picked the largest of the remaining thugs, and bore down on him with a resounding curse. Kipp leaped for a mangy-looking gent with a cadaverous face and handlebar mustaches. Ferd spotted Black Haley, and lunged forward. Threep, the slowest runner of the four, picked the only fat man among the outlaws, a portly renegade with a belly like a calving cow.

And those four thugs were the only ones left alive among the eight who had guarded the train. Four thugs. Four Jeppsons.

The four outlaws took one look at the oncoming brothers and decided that safety of hide was more important than all the gold west of the Rockies. They tried to turn and take to their heels.

But Ferd and Kronk were too quick for the biggest crook and Black Haley. Those two went down.

Only the cadaverous-faced gent with handlebar mustaches and the portly gent with the belly got away.

They wheeled and headed for parts unknown, the fat outlaw struggling to keep up with the mangy one. Threepwood and Kipp, peeved at being cheated of their share in the reprisal, chased them.

Threepwood fired a couple of bullets into the trail at the fat man's heels. The fat one let out a howl and buck-jumped over a boulder.

Threepwood panted in disgust to Kipp, running along beside him, "Damn it, can't shoot even a polecat in the back, when it runs on two legs and wears pants. But we kin sort of help 'em over the high places."

"Yaay!" agreed Kipp fervently, and emptied his left-hand gun at the lean man's heels. "Boy, howdy! Lookit 'em go!"

From behind them Kronk's bull-roar boomed down the trail. "Hi! Come on back here, you idjits! What the hell you think yo're doin'?"

Kipp and Threepwood slowed to a stop, holstered their guns and turned back. Threepwood said defensively, "We wasn't doin' nothin'. Jest helpin' 'em over the rough spots."

"Well, git busy and help me round up the pack train," Kronk commanded. "Plenty of horses around. We'll take the ore and ride back to our own nags. Might's well jest take all the horses with us. We kin use 'em."

Threepwood looked longingly back up the trail, where the fat man was just disappearing over a ridge against the sunset sky. "Wish I coulda got a chancet at that jigger from head on."

"Leave the yaller ones out for seed," Kronk grunted. "Git busy, will you? Damn it, we got to use one of the saddle horses for this pore brute's load."

He pointed to one of the pack horses, lying dead a few feet away, killed by somebody's bullet.

"Want me to do it?" Ferd asked.

Kronk shook his head. "You help the twins round up the rest of the horses, button. I'll have the load off this carcass in jig time."

Ferd turned away to join Threepwood and Kipp, and Kronk knelt by the dead pack animal. One of the ore sacks had broken open when the horse had fallen, and the glittering whitish ore had scattered.

Kronk picked it up thoughtfully and poked it back into the sack. But he made no move to change the load from the pack animal's carcass to one of the saddle horses.

He dragged the sacks of ore to one side and heaved them into concealment in the

brush. He glanced up as his brothers came riding toward him.

"Well, here's yore pack train," Ferd announced.

Kronk nodded. "Yeah, I see. But we ain't hittin' for home, like I figured. I changed my mind. Our nags will be all right where we left 'em till we git back. We're goin' to cache the ore here, then hit for Bearcat Bend."

Threepwood blinked. "What's the sense of that? We licked 'em, didn't we? We got the ore, ain't we?"

"Yeah, we did and we have," Kronk admitted. "But I don't like the idea of them jiggers goin' on to Bearcat Bend and holdin' no powwow about us with Bignose Breedon, and us not doin' nothin' about it. They're goin' to make trouble for us sooner or later. We might's well git it over now."

No Jeppson ever demurred at a suggestion like that. Ferd and the twins promptly agreed with enthusiasm.

"And if we cain't clean up a dinky little dump like Bearcat Bend," Kipp added, "we better go away back and sit down, and let Peters do the fightin'."

"That'll be enough outa you," Kronk said. "Gimme a hand with this ore, and let's be on our way."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Wolves' Den

IN the last glow of the sunset, the Jeppson brothers, astride the outlaws' horses, rode on down the trail toward Bearcat Bend. It was only another day's ride, and they cut that in half by keeping a steady pace on the trail all night.

At dawn they stopped long enough to partly cook and eat, half raw, two brush rabbits each. Then they hit the trail again, fortified by food and refreshed by the short rest. At mid-afternoon they rounded a wide bend in the trail, and Catamount Gulch and Bearcat Bend came into sight.

The brothers surveyed the buildings and board shacks in silence and with judicious appraisal. Men along the board sidewalks eyed them in wary suspicion as they rode up the street, but none ventured a word of challenge or greeting.

The brothers rode on in their usual formation; Ferd turned his head to speak over his shoulder to the twins. "Ain't such a bad lookin' joint. Plenty saloons. Fella shore got no excuse to go thirsty in Bearcat Bend."

Threepwood said he wasn't thirsty yet. Kipp didn't answer. He was looking, narrow-eyed, at the place where the street ended, a scant block away.

The Fidler's Bight Saloon did not flaunt the lusty welcome patent with the Bend's other twelve saloons. On the contrary, its patronage seemed to be a closed circle. A surly looking guard stood watch by the door, a scowl on his face.

Threepwood winked at Kipp.

The doorman was the cadaverous gent with the handlebar mustache.

The brothers stopped their horses, swung to the ground and headed straight for the door.

The doorkeeper looked once, blinked his eyes, quivered at the knees, and crowded aside to give the Jeppson boys plenty of room. They surged past him, and Threepwood poked a thumb in the cadaverous man's ribs and grinned.

"Had a good run, didn't we, fella?"

The cadaverous man gulped and backed away.

The Jeppson brothers lunged into the Fidler's Bight Saloon.

They went where they customarily went, right to the center of things. They took no outward notice of the baker's dozen assorted gunhands along the bar, nor of the twenty-odd claim-jumpers and thugs pursuing their various amusements about the room.

Bignose Breedon was dealing stud at a table by the far wall. None of the brothers could mistake Bignose Breedon. Piney Peters had described him too accurately.

Kronk elbowed one belligerent-eyed gunhand aside and made a beeline for Breedon's table. Threep, Kipp and Ferd followed in close formation.

"You Bignose Breedon?" Kronk said.

Breedon laid down his cards and looked up. He was tall and wide; a huge man.

"The same," he said sourly. "Who the hell are you, and what do you want?"

The other three brothers had no idea as yet just what Kronk's plan was. They didn't need to know. They had learned long before to follow Kronk's lead blindly.

Kronk thrust out his lantern jaw and leered down at Breedon. "We're jest the Jeppson boys, mister. Dropped in on the way home from Sunday School to settle a little matter of a debt."

"The hell you say!" Breedon stared, and his huge nose turned redder. "Don't ever remember seein' you before. If you owe me any money, settle up with the bartender. He keeps books."

"Who said I owed you anything?" Kronk snapped. "I'm collectin'."

"Collectin'!" Bignose Breedon echoed, his heavy face blank with astonishment. "You crazy? Or are you just lookin' for a dose of lead to cool you off?"

"Is yore hearin' bad?" Kronk inquired, with mild concern. "I jest said I'm collectin', didn't I?"

* * *

ALL through the saloon a peculiar silence began to grow. Men ceased whatever they were doing and turned to look toward the table where Breedon sat.

Kronk paid no attention to anyone else. That is, not that anybody could see, he didn't. He scowled down at Breedon, never taking his eyes off that gent's face.

Kronk said loudly, "We're here to see about a little debt you owe an old gent that's a friend of ourn. Your thugs borried all the cash he had, and he ain't in the bankin' business. Kind of embarrassed him temporary, you might say."

"You're nuts!" Breedon flared. "None of my boys borries money, you fool. They takes what they wants."

"Seems like they do," Kronk nodded. "That's how they borried this old gent's cash. By force. And, of course, it wa'n't in coin yit, but gold's gold, whether it's in the ore or the mint. And, of course, it was only a loan, seein' as we got it back. But they done had it two days, and folks usually pays interests on loans."

Breedon slid back a couple of inches in his chair. His eyes narrowed and went hard as rock.

"Git out of here, you damn fool," he gritted. "Unless you wanta be carried out feet first, git out quick!"

Kronk merely turned his head, glanced over his shoulder and winked at Threepwood. "What'd you call a fair rate of interest, Threep?"

"Oh, 'bout a hunnert percent per day." Threepwood answered without taking his gaze from a red-headed gun-fanner over by the roulette wheel.

Kronk calculated aloud, returning his regard to Breedon. "Hmm. Two thousand dollars for two days at one hunnert percent. Countin' principal, that'd make six thousand blueberries. But we'll settle for five thousand cash, payment pronto."

Bignose Breedon was still a little uncertain what it was all about. He thought possibly the towering Kronk might be a bit light in the head.

"Git out!" he said again.

Kronk stared at him with eyes gone bleak and cold. "Listen, you cheap four-flusher," he rasped. "Yore drygulchers shot old Piney Peters in the back and snaked his pile of ore outen his mine on Bearcat Mountain. We ketched 'em on

the trail with the rock and cleaned 'em. If you don't believe it, go dig 'em up and ask 'em."

Breedon knew, then. He knew these were the four hell-benders the fat man and the cadaverous man had told about. He cursed himself for a fool, for not knowing it instantly. He leaped from his chair, hands flashing downward.

He wasn't quite fast enough.

Kronk's mawl-hard fist lashed out. That punch started from the floor.

Breedon didn't even get his guns out of their holsters. As Kronk's fist connected with his jaw, Breedon rose higher, his head flew back, his whole body catapulted over the back of his chair.

The whole action had been so sudden that the entire roomful of men seemed paralyzed to inaction for an instant. In another moment sudden death was due to blast at the four brothers. But they didn't wait for it.

As usual, their teamwork was as amazing as it was violent.

Kronk wheeled. One swift buckjump carried him to the middle of the floor. Another jump landed him behind the pot-bellied stove near the wall.

The whole room roared into an inferno of lead and gunsmoke.

Threepwood, with his first shot, dispatched the red-headed gunhand over by the roulette wheel. With bullets whistling around his head, Threep cleared the mahogany bar in one long leap.

The bartender and two of his henchmen started for Threepwood. Threep ducked and mowed them down. Which rendered the bar a trifle more tenable as a barricade.

Kipp leaped for the unconscious Breedon, grasped the back of Breedon's neck with a horny paw, and tossed the man behind the shelter of the woodbox.

Then he whirled to pour a stream of lead into the press of Breedon's outlaws in the nigh corner of the room. Ferd charged hell-bent into the thick of the lead and gunsmoke, fighting with fists, guns, feet and teeth.

In all the history of that wild town, there'd never been a wilder brawl than now broke in the Fidler's Bight.

* * *

AS a result of the Jeppsons' initial barrage, a half dozen dead bodies already lay strewn about the room. But there were thirty more Breedon wolves lusting for blood.

One ugly-eyed hombre rose up near the end of the bar, gun leveled on Ferd's back. Threepwood and Kipp cut the fellow down with a bullet each.

Another lifted his head above the protection of a fallen poker table. Kronk put a whining slug neatly above that one's right eye. Over by the woodbox, the outlaw boss began to squirm.

But the sharp-eyed Kipp was keeping a weather watch that way, for reasons of his own. He snatched up a beer bottle, swayed down and whammed Breedon back into unconsciousness.

The battle was rolling into its high gear, now. After the first, fierce outbreak there hadn't exactly been a lull, but the astounded outlaw crew had needed even that to get their second wind.

They had it now, and they roared into concerted action.

The group at the far end of the room had been held for an instant by the Jeppson button.

Now they began to force him back slowly, every one of them trying to get a shot at him, and afraid they'd shoot each other. His swaying, kicking, hammering figure wasn't a very good target.

But they were getting the edge on him. They'd have him where they could get at him in another minute.

Kronk saw the way things were turning for the kid.

Kronk's bull-throated roar boomed

above the melee. A sudden hush fell over the room on the heels of that appalling sound. And the men of Breedon's outfit stared open-mouthed at the huge man who rose behind the stove.

Kronk reached down. He bowed his back. He gripped the pot-bellied stove by its legs and tore it from the floor by the roots. He lifted it squarely above his head and skyrocketed it over the head of the embattled Ferd.

The air was cold back there in the deep hills, even on a summer day. The big stove always had a fire in it during afternoon and evenings. It had a pretty fair fire in it now. Kronk hurled it squarely into the faces of Ferd's enemies.

Yells and howls and curses of pain rose from the spot, as the men backed and fought to evade the hot iron of the stove and the searing embers.

Ferd took advantage of the respite to achieve the protection of the bar in a flying leap. Kronk followed close behind. Kipp took time out to glance at Breedon. Breedon was stirring again. Kipp broke another beer bottle over his head.

Breedon's men, there were a mere eighteen of them left now, began hurling a steady barrage at the bar.

Kronk and Ferd retaliated by slamming bottles into the thick of the outlaw gang. The odors of bar whiskey and beer fought with the stinging aroma of gunsmoke for supremacy.

Between bottles and bullets, the Jeppsons temporarily kept the thugs at the far end of the room.

The number of outlaws was still whittling down. Only twelve of them now remained.

Kronk sniffed at the air, and his roar rose again. "Hell, there ain't only a handful of 'em left. Take 'em!"

The four Jeppsons went over the bar like a tidal wave, yowling and cursing and shooting.

That formidable charge swept everything before it, forming a solid mass of thugs, broken furniture and gambling apparatus, which piled up against the front wall.

Something had to give. That something was the wall. The entire wall opening into the street. It creaked, and groaned, and timbers began to crack and splinter.

The timbers strained and snapped, and crashed outward, pitching into the street a bedlam of roaring humanity.

* * *

THE four brothers bore up at the edge of the wreckage. They backed and drew breath, and stood looking down at what was left of the Breedon gang, a mere seven live men, and those seven battered and lacerated.

Lining the street on either side, the men of Bearcat Bend who were not of the Breedon gang had come running from the other saloons.

It had not occurred to any of them that the day of reckoning had come for the Breedon gang. They expected to see just another brawl of the Breedon caliber, with some reckless strangers killed off.

But there could be no mistake in what they saw now. The whole front wall of the saloon having been pushed outward, they could view the outlaw dead.

A hardy fellow at the fore of the crowd drew a long breath and addressed Kronk.

"Fella, I didn't think it could be done! The Breedon gang cleaned out! We been waitin' for this day for ten year! You can leave them other seven to us. We'll take care of them. Pick up yore doll rags and come have a drink on us."

Kronk turned. He was a formidable sight. His right eyebrow drooped over his eye, from severed flesh cleaved through by a slashing .45 slug.

Kipp's shirtfront showed a spreading stain of crimson from a bullet through the shoulder.

Threep limped slightly from a slug through the thigh.

Ferd's upper right arm was blood-stained and his chin was cut.

Kronk gave the wreckage in the street one last glance, then turned to answer the man who had invited them to have a drink.

"Sartain shore we will, stranger, and thank ye kindly. As soon as we tend to a little business inside. You shag these here jiggers outa the way." He gestured toward the remaining outlaws. "Be with you in a minute." He turned toward the wrecked saloon. "Come on, boys."

He strode into the ruined Fidler's Bight, his brothers at his elbows.

Kipp made straight for the woodbox.

When he came back, Kronk was leaning on the bar, counting money out of Bignose Breedon's money box.

"Sixty-eight, sixty-nine, seventy — eleven thousand, nine hunnert and seventy-two berries," Kronk said crisply, and began to poke the money, paper, gold and silver, into his pockets. "Load up, boys. It's goin' to take all our pockets to carry it, and we got to git it back to Piney, pronto."

"To Piney!" Ferd stared. "What the hell is that for? Ain't it enough to take his good gold ore home to him?"

"Gold!" Kronk laughed. "Hell, that ore of Piney's ain't sylvanite, button. You'd a knowed it too, if you'd seen it."

Kipp gasped. "Fool's gold!"

"Ain't nothin' else," Kronk affirmed. "Plain iron pyrites. Piney's gittin' old. He cain't see so good no more. He thought it was sylvanite. And these thugs thought it was gold when they stole it from him."

"So *that* was why you had to come collectin'," Ferd said.

"Hell yes, we had to come collectin'," Kronk agreed. "Couldn't let no pal of old Jeeter's down, could we? Well, let's git goin', and—what's wrong with you?"

"I'm mad!" Kipp glowered. "Damn it, I had Breedon all saved out to string up, and the damn fool had to stop a stray bullet."

"Tough luck." Kronk shoved a last handful of bills into his pocket. "But don't let it throw you none. After we git our drink, you kin help these Bearcat Benders string up them other seven jiggers. . . ."

Four days later the brothers rode up the lane to the Fair Haven ranch buildings. They herded with them the horses and pack horses left by the Breedons.

As they neared the end of the lane, Kronk said amiably, "I'll send Booby for Doc Masters right away, and we kin have him sort of look us over."

But there was no need to send for Doc Masters. Masters was sitting in the house with Booby Jock and old Piney, waiting for them. He grinned at the four.

"About time you was gittin' here," he said. "Booby come for me two days ago, figurin' you'd be needin' me when you got home. Hell, don't you think I got any other patients to take care of? What took you so long?"

Kronk shrugged. "We done made a little side trip to the smelter. Turned in Piney's ore for him and collected. Brought a little mite over what you figured, Piney. Little over eleven thousand."

Piney gaped. "Gee whillikins!"

Masters said impatiently, "Peel, you tomcats. I got to get you patched up and in bed for a few days rest."

"In bed!" Kronk glowered. "Hell no, we ain't goin' to bed. We got business."

Masters groaned. "What now!"

"Well, you patch us up pretty, that's all!" Kronk commanded. "When we git some man-size grub under our belts, we're foggin' it. There's a dance over to the Hot Creek schoolhouse tonight. We got to have some amusement once in a while. Hell, a man cain't work all the time."

THE END

Wedding Bells and Bullets

By GLEN H. WICKMAN

Little did Bridegroom George English think that on his wedding day his losing rivals for fair, sweet Edna's hand would pull him from the boghole—of a granite-ware shower!

ED TUCKER is a noble sort of a hombre, all right, but this day he doesn't feel very noble, and neither do I. It is Edna Colfax's wedding day, and Ed and I have both made love to her and been left dwelling at the post. To be very truthful about it, we never even got out of the starting gate. I doubt if we ever even got to the place where they saddle the horses. She is going to marry a fellow named George English.

"Why," I says to Ed Tucker," as far as Edna's concerned, we might just as well have been born eighty years ago in Hong Kong, and died of spring fever in Zamboanga."

We leave our horses . . . and advance stealthily upon Valley Springs . . .

"Oh, shut up," Ed says. "I feel bad enough without having to listen to your reminiscences as a disappointed lover. Just keep quiet."

We are on our way to Valley Springs for the wedding and are riding a couple of horses because our car only has three tires. We work for a rancher named Silas Pederman and the country around Valley Springs is pretty wild and uncivilized because it has not yet been discovered by the dudes. It is going to be a church wedding, at one o'clock in the afternoon, and everybody in these parts attends weddings and funerals, whether they're invited or not. Especially disappointed lovers and enemies of the deceased. This often leads to arguments and other forms of trouble.

So we are riding down the creek road toward Valley Springs, which isn't very much of a town, and are almost there when somebody yells "Hey!" at us from the tall brush that is to the right of the road.

"Hey!" the man yells again, so we naturally stop to see what the commotion is about. He peers out from behind a bush a hundred feet off the road and beckons to us.

"By gosh!" Ed Tucker exclaims. "It looks like George English, the happy bridegroom!"

We ride through the brush and there is George English, although it is a little hard to recognize him at first because, in place of having a hat on his head, he has a granite ware bedroom utensil. It is shoved down to his ears and just as we come up George is wrestling with the thing, trying to get it off his head. Mr. English evidently doesn't care a hell of a lot for wedding etiquette because he's wearing a pair of chaps. I think at first that George is as stiff as a section off a corrugated iron roof, but it isn't that. He's as sober as a bucket of water.

"This damn thing's stuck on my head!" George moans. "I can't get it off. And the wedding ain't more'n an hour away. I can't be married with this thing on!"

Now this is a situation for you, all right. Neither Ed Tucker nor I can imagine anybody getting married with a bedroom utensil stuck on his head. Not, anyway, to a dear little kitten like Edna Colfax, who has an uncle like John Anderson and an aunt like Millie Anderson, both of whom are severe and strong minded and given to violence.

If there are two more proud people west of the Pecos than Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, neither I nor Ed Tucker have ever heard about them. They not only own a slice of Valley Springs, but quite a lot of the country thereabouts. Edna, having lost her parents, has come to live with them, and now she is getting married. And she is going to get married in style, come hell-fire or high water.

And besides that, whoever heard of anybody ever wearing a bedroom utensil for a hat?

"Help me get this thing off," George beseeches us. "Be good guys and let bygones be bygones."

I look at Ed Tucker and I can see that he is struggling with himself—and also with his soul. Shall he be a noble guy or shall he let nature take its course?

"If I show up with this thing on," George continues, "John Anderson may murder me. Even if he *hears* about it he may murder me. And that's nothing to what Millie Anderson may do!"

"You're right there," I says. "And think of how poor, dear little Edna's likely to feel!"

"There ain't much time," groans George. "Oh, my God! Why did anything like this have to happen? Why couldn't it have happened to me yesterday, or tomorrow? Or to somebody else?"

"Gentlemen," Ed Tucker announces, "my more noble instincts have momentarily triumphed over my baser ones.

We'll be glad to help you, George. On account of Edna."

* * *

SO ME and Ed climb down off our horses. I grab hold of George English's posterior from behind, and Ed Tucker grabs hold of the bedroom utensil. We pull. The bridegroom's neck stretches. Nothing else happens except that George English hollers: "You're killing me! I'm dying!"

We haven't budged the thing a quarter of an inch. So we abandon the pulling.

"An interesting situation," observes Ed. "The human skull is often constructed with a protuberance in the back of it. The granite ware is stuck on that. Your head, George, is knottier than most."

"Try again," George says. "Pull real hard. I might as well be dead."

We do that, and still nothing happens, except that George yells louder than ever.

"How in the name of hell," Ed Tucker asks, "did you get this thing stuck on your dome?"

"You know the Hanniford rooming house?" George answers. "There was a line of these things out in the sun up against the side wall. I was coming up the path beside the rooming house. I stumbled and fell and took a header right into 'em. That's how it happened. When I found I couldn't get it off I ran down the back way and out here in the brush."

"Did anybody see you!" Ed asks.

"I doubt it," George says. "I hope to high heaven they didn't. What'll we do now?"

"A blacksmith," I suggest, "ought to be able to cut it off with a chisel or a sledge hammer."

"Everything's closed up for the weddin'," English says, "except the saloon. And if I show up with this thing on—Why, I can't even think any more! My circulation's been cut off!"

We canvass the possibilities. There is only one thing that will surely happen. John and Millie Anderson will throw a fit. We remember that in his early days John was quite a hand with a gun. He was easily insulted in those days and he's twice as easily insulted now.

"It's simply awful," George English says.

There is no doubt about this, either.

Once more I look at Ed Tucker, and again I see that he is struggling with his soul. Ed is certainly a man who can think of things in an emergency. If there is one gent in the world who can think of what to do it is Ed Tucker. And I know what he is thinking, which is, to wit: If Edna doesn't marry this big lummox she'll once more be in circulation. There's no telling how the cards may fall next time. And, besides, she hadn't ought to marry a guy who would get a bedroom utensil stuck on his head.

"You were very careless, George," I says. "If you're as careless with poor little Edna you may be dropping her out of a ten-story window or having her run over by a train."

All George English does is moan.

"Is she very fond of you?" Ed Tucker asks.

"Of course," English gasps. "Oh, my God! She wants to marry me, don't she! Can't somebody think of something?"

"Gentlemen," Ed announces, "my noble instincts have won out again. I believe I've thought of a solution. Obviously, Bill and I can't get that thing off your head, George, without killing you. So I'll arrange to have you married with it on."

"Nonsense!" hollers George. "I might as well be dead as to even try it!"

Tucker looks as sad as an old goat. "I'll make you out to be a great hero with the thing on," he says. "You'll be talked about for the next hundred years."

"Impossible!" George English roars. "If I had a gun I'd blow my brains out!"

None of us have any firearms, so this is no way out.

"A great hero," Ed repeats. "Mr. and Mrs. Anderson will be very proud of you with the granite ware for a hat." Ed is looking off at the sky, and smiling around the corners of his mouth, and I am not sure whether his intentions are any longer honorable. Or if they ever have been.

"Ah, shucks," I says.

"Not only will you be a bridegroom," Ed Tucker elucidates, "but you'll be a valiant hombre besides." He jerks his thumb at me. "Bill and I'll attend to it."

George makes one more attempt to get the thing off his head, but it is no dice. "I wish I'd been born an Indian!" he complains loudly. "They don't have these things around for innocent people to stumble into! It's murdering me! My brains ache!"

"After the ceremony," Ed says, "and before the train leaves, we'll have the blacksmith cut it off. Or blow it off with a charge of dynamite."

"I'm dying!" George gasps. "I believe I am—"

"You may be able to sell what's left of it to a museum," Ed Tucker says. "You'll be that celebrated. The only things we need now are three loaded revolvers. I remember that Hagerman's bartender is quite a guy for guns. He lives in a room behind the grogshop. Come on."

* * *

SO WE leave our horses there in the brush and advance stealthily upon Valley Springs on foot. We come up to within sight of the backs of the buildings that front on the south side of the main street. From what we hear and see, practically everybody has come in for the wedding. Down near one end of the street is the Methodist Church, and it is here that most of the folks are congregated. The wedding march, it appears, is due to start in about twenty-two minutes.

As we stand at the edge of the brush and look at all of this George English likes to break down. "I wish I was in Siberia," he says weakly. "Think what'll happen when people spot me with this thing on. They'll laugh their heads off. I may even be locked up forever as a lunatic."

"Not after you've fought with the bandits," Ed says.

"What bandits?" I asks.

"Oh, just some bandits," Ed answers. "You gents wait here and I'll be back in a flash."

With that he walks boldly out of the brush, and the last we see of him he is walking in through the rear door of Hagerman's Bar.

"By now," George says, "little Edna'll be about ready to leave her uncle's house."

"That isn't half as bad," I tells him, "as that her aunt and uncle'll be leaving with her. You're supposed to be waiting at the church."

"Let's try just once more to get this thing off," George suggests.

So we do that, but again it is no use.

About five minutes, and Ed Tucker comes back. He is carrying something wrapped up in a pillow case. It turns out to be three loaded revolvers. He hands one to George, I get one and Ed keeps one himself.

"We're ready for the bandits," Ed says. "Put those things in your pockets. Follow me. I've got the general outline of what we're going to do in my mind, but I'll have to improvise the details. You birds just keep still and let me do the talking."

"I don't like it," I says. "This thing begins to savor of grand larceny."

"I've lost all hope," George says.

Nevertheless we put the guns in our pockets and follow Ed in the direction of the rear of the Drovers' Bank. The build-

ings that face the street are not all jammed up together. Through a gap we see Sheriff Biscoff escorting a citizen who has had too much sarsaparilla down toward the pokey.

"May the good Lord have mercy on my soul," George murmurs. "I don't like this."

"Neither do I," I says. "There ain't been any bandits around here in years."

"I'm having a good time," Ed Tucker says. "I ain't ever felt more virtuous, or full of ideas."

We pass the bank and come near to the back end of the rooming house. We are now no more than three hundred feet from the Methodist Church, although we cannot actually see it from where we are. The backyards of the buildings are all deserted because everybody has shut up for the wedding.

"Follow me," Ed continues.

He runs back a little way and up beside the rooming house. Me and poor George English are in hot pursuit. When we come out on the street a great commotion has started. Everybody is running toward the direction from which the shots had come.

"It's all over!" Ed Tucker shouts. "It's all over, folks!" He points at George English. "There's the brave fellow that done it!"

* * *

NOBODY pays any attention, at first. People are running every which way; men, women, children and dogs. Then somebody spots that thing on George's head. The guy points and laughs out loud. And continues to laugh.

Don't miss the rousing, rip-roaring Western stories in our brother magazine, ACE-HIGH! This month, be sure to read J. E. Grinstead's "The Great Horsethief Syndicate!" On sale Nov. 26!

Just then the church bell begins to ring.

"That wasn't on the program," George English says. "Maybe it means that the church is burning—"

"Out with your guns," Ed interrupts. "When we're through shootin', Bill and I'll throw ours away. George, you keep yours."

"Shoot at what?" I asks.

"Straight up in the air," Ed says. "We don't want to hurt anybody. All right. Let her fly!"

So the three of us bang away with the guns until they are empty. Ed and I toss ours over into some rubish. Nothing seems to make any sense.

"Listen!" Ed Tucker directs.

We listen. Kind of a hush has come over Valley Springs. It is a pause, like the interval between a flash of lightning and the clap of thunder.

He has a rgular belly laugh that hurts.

"Haw! Haw! Haw! Haw!" the guy roars. And a half dozen other citizens are now laughing with him.

Me and George are still trailing along behind Ed Tucker. He is heading straight for the church. Before we get there we are surrounded by a crowd. By now a lot of folks are pointing at George's strange idea of a hat. Some of them are so astonished that they are standing with their mouths open and forgetting to close them. But quite a lot of them are hooting with merriment and slapping their knees and acting outlandish. George, himself, looks as though he wishes he could sink into the street. The wedding party comes out of the church to see what the excitement is about.

There is first of all Mrs. Millie Anderson. She is a large woman with a lot of

flowers on herself and her hat. She looks a great deal like a perambulating hothouse. Then there is Mr. John Anderson. John has on a claw-hammer coat and striped trousers and a shirt so stiff that it bulges out in front like the side of a barn that is about to burst from having too much hay in it. And then there is dear little Edna, in her white veil with the artificial orange blossoms on it. And there are about a hundred other people besides, most of them freshly washed and curried and combed.

Mrs. Anderson turns as white as a bartender's apron when she sees George English with the granite ware on his dome. Then little red spots begin to appear on the whiteness of her cheeks. She is getting up pressure to explode.

John Anderson is getting white, too. His fingers are twitching. This is a bad sign. It means that his muscles are working themselves up to take a swing at somebody. Then there is dear little Edna. She stands there looking at George with her big blue eyes, and it is as clear as anything that she doesn't know what to think, but she is trying to think the best.

About this time Ed Tucker stops walking, throws out his chest and points dramatically at George.

"Folks!" Ed hollers. "There stands the bravest man that ever trod shoe leather!"

"Merciful heaven!" Mrs. Anderson gasps.

"My God!" shouts John Anderson.

"Oh, dear!" little Edna whispers.

"Horse feathers!" somebody in the crowd calls.

George English looks wildly about from under his strange head piece. It's a toss-up whether he'll run for dear life or stay where he is.

"Silence!" Ed Tucker demands. "That shooting you just heard was George English's battle with two burglars. They were trying to break their way into the rear of the Drovers' Bank. Bill and I saw the whole thing. If we'd been armed we'd have helped George. He had to fight the battle all by himself. He won—"

"Bandits!" interrupts somebody. "Where they gone? Call the sheriff!"

"The two men escaped in a hail of bullets," Ed explains. "I suppose they're hightailing it now up the creek road. It doesn't matter. They didn't get anything. Thanks to our brave friend here!"

Once more he points dramatically at George. Just as though he actually expects anybody to believe such a fairy tale.

"George English!" Mrs. Millie Anderson shrieks. "Take that thing off your head! Take it off instantly!"

John Anderson starts to say something, but fortunately gets a cuss word stuck sideways in his larynx and likes to choke.

Dear little Edna has tears in her blue eyes. The minister comes out of the church and looks completely puzzled.

By now Edna's Aunt Millie is advancing upon George with the evident intention of doing him great bodily harm.

"Hold everything, madam!" Ed shouts. "Don't you dare touch that man! If you do the wrath of heaven'll be on your head! And besides it'll be bad luck!"

Millie is enough impressed so that she stops moving. But her husband has quit choking over the naughty word and is on the warpath for fair.

"I'll thrash you," he shouts at George, "within an inch of your life! Showing up at a wedding like this! Why—"

"Calm yourself, Mr. Anderson!" Ed beseeches loudly.

"Please, please, Uncle John," Edna puts in. She has hold of her uncle's claw-hammer coat tails.

George English doubles up his fists. He has finally got around to be mad himself. "By God!" George hollers. "I'd like to take a sock at somebody! I've had about enough!"

"Peace! Peace!" Ed Tucker roars. "Can't you folks listen?"

"For the last time, George English," Millie Anderson interrupts, "take that ridiculous thing off your—"

"He can't," Ed says, "because it's stuck on there! It simply can't be budged. But there's no reason why he should take it off just yet, because it's a badge of honor!"

* * *

THIS is such an astonishing statement that after folks have finished laughing at it they quiet down and listen. And besides that, Sheriff Biscoff comes up and serves notice that he will not stand for any rioting.

"When George saw the burglars," Ed explains, "he knew he'd have to charge them single-handed. And he knew, likewise, that he'd be due at his wedding in about ten minutes. Naturally he didn't want to show up as a corpse. Yet he had his duty as a citizen to do. It was only fair that he give himself every break possible. A man's most vulnerable portion of his anatomy when he's charging into something is his head. George thought of his head and how to protect it from flying bullets. At that instant he spotted this bedroom utensil. He used rare sense in picking it up and putting it on his head before the battle started."

While I listen to this I want to blush. But then I am proud of Ed because nobody in the world could have thought of it but him, even if there isn't any sense to it. And the crowd seems to be impressed, too, because they are quiet.

"Oh, George!" little Edna whispers.

"Damned nonsense!" John Anderson grumbles.

"I was never so humiliated—" Millie begins.

"Come! Come!" Ed says. "Let the wedding proceed instantly. There's very little time before the train'll be in. While Edna's changing her clothes to go away we'll have the blacksmith remove the badge of honor from George's head."

Everybody in the crowd thinks that this is a swell idea, and everybody says so. They laugh a little about it and slap each other and George English on the back, and all decide that the wedding must be held instantly.

John Anderson looks at his wife and his wife looks at John. Neither has ever been so mad before. Both are fit to be tied. And both realize that the situation is now out of their hands. A crowd in a town like Valley Springs isn't something to be monkied with.

"All right," John says. "Let's get it over with."

So we all troop into the church and things proceed as per schedule. Edna Colfax and George English are joined in holy wedlock. And despite the fact that George has the bedroom utensil still on his head, nobody laughs.

After the ceremony Edna kisses Ed Tucker more seriously than she does anyone except the groom. Then we take George down to the blacksmith shop and the operation is performed. The operation is a success, but it is tough on the patient.

Then we are down at the depot and the semi-weekly mixed passenger and freight comes in and away goes Mr. and Mrs. George English out upon the prairie of life.

Ed sighs deep and says, "When Edna kissed me she told me that I was the dearest liar she ever hoped to meet."

Sheriff Biscoff comes up and taps us on the shoulders. "Thirty days in the jug," he says, "for the promiscuous discharge of firearms."

"All right," Ed agrees. "I think it was worth it."

"Oh, hell," Biscoff says. "I was only fooling. How about a drink?"

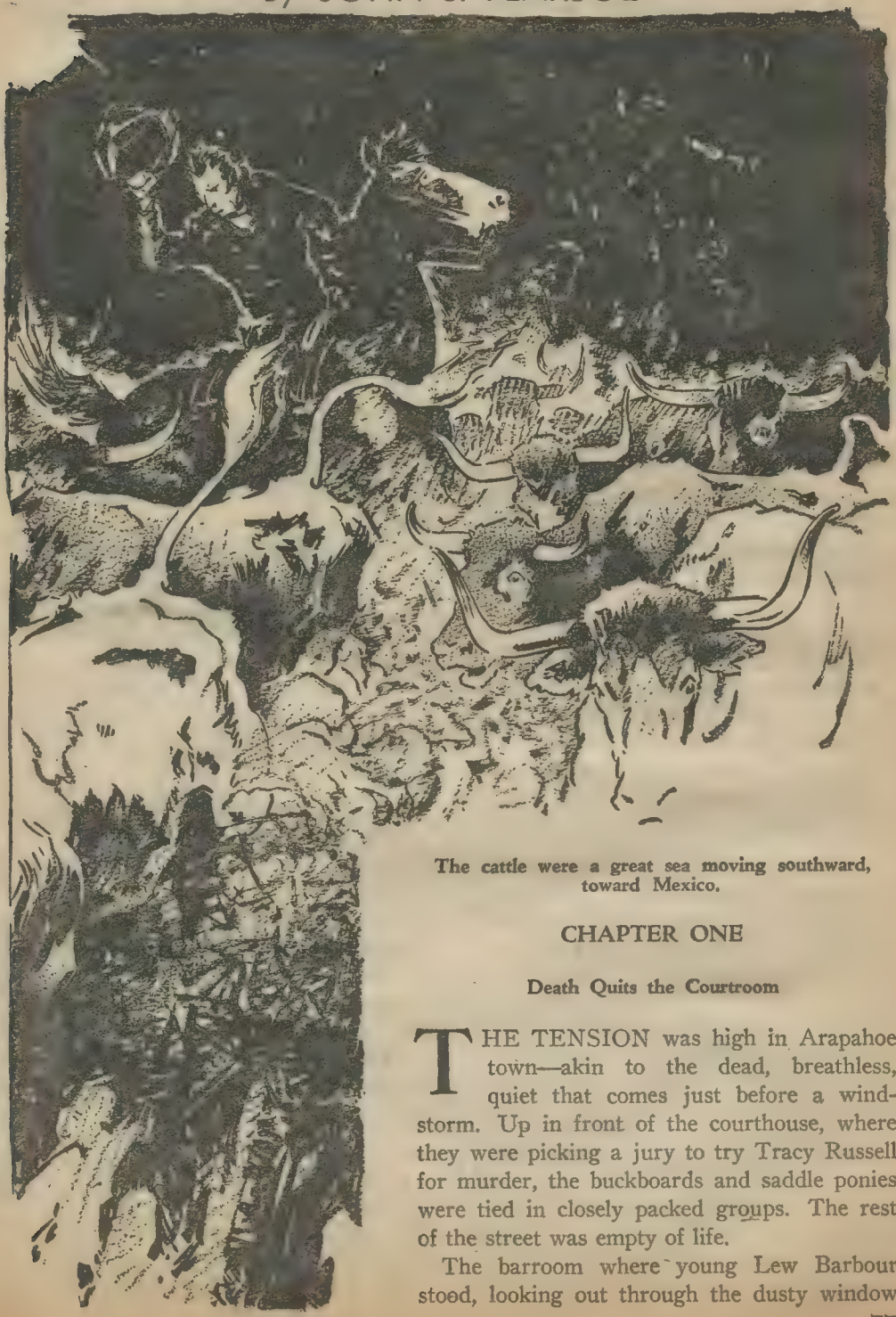
• SATAN'S KILLERS

A saga of a bullet damned range

Why did Lew Barbour pray for the guts and the will to live, when he was damned as a cheat by his sweetheart, branded killer-rustler by the law and stood, bullet-riddled and unarmed, before a one-man Colt-swift jury which knew no other verdict than death?

RIDE AT NIGHT! • •

By JOHN J. PEARSOL



The cattle were a great sea moving southward, toward Mexico.

CHAPTER ONE

Death Quits the Courtroom

THE TENSION was high in Arapahoe town—akin to the dead, breathless, quiet that comes just before a windstorm. Up in front of the courthouse, where they were picking a jury to try Tracy Russell for murder, the buckboards and saddle ponies were tied in closely packed groups. The rest of the street was empty of life.

The barroom where young Lew Barbour stood, looking out through the dusty window

pane, was almost deserted. Barbour was thinking about that tension, and about Tracy Russell, the man who had killed Pete Howell. Lew had seen that killing; the only gent who had. He could hang Tracy Russell or set him free. . . .

But whether Tracy Russell was to live or die didn't seem to be the most important item on tap this day. To Barbour, there seemed to be something else; something almost as vital as the life of a man. He sensed it as some intangible thing, baffling and bothersome. Perhaps it was that this might be the showdown between the hard-riding Russell outfit and Clark Lassiter, cattle king of Arapahoe Basin.

Behind the bar, Bug-eye, the fat, florid-faced barkeep, wiped industriously at a non-existant spot on the polished mahogany. Striving to make his voice casual, he said to Barbour, "I don't suppose you'd care to say whether Russell murdered Howell, or whether Pete had a gun, or anything like that, would you?"

Eyes veiled, long-fingered hands slowly fashioning a cigarette, Barbour shook his head. A tinge of sarcasm was in his voice when he spoke. "Of course I know that's just curiosity on your part, Bug-eye. You wouldn't want to know because Clay Russell or Lassiter asked you to find out."

Injured innocence jumped to Bug-eye's florid face. "Me?" he inquired, placing a fat finger on his chest. "Now, you know me better than that, Lew. Me put you in a spot? You don't think I'd do that, do you?"

A faint smile touched Lew's lips. "No," he said, "I didn't think you'd do that."

"Sure not," Bug-eye avowed earnestly. "I know what'd happen if you let that information out. If you'd say Tracy shot Pete when Pete didn't have a gun, old Clay Russell would see to it you was killed before the trial. And if you said Pete did have a gun, then Lassister, seein' he wants to get at the Russells so bad, would mebby get you into a ruckus with some of his fast-handed gunnies." Bug-eye wiped harder on the glittering bar top. "An' you suggest, mebby, that I'd tell one of them gents, Lew."

"I didn't say you would," Lew said softly. "Remember, Bug-eye?—I said you wouldn't want to know."

Disappointment on his sweaty face, the barkeep nodded. "Yeah, that's right."

Carey, a young deputy, came down the street and into the saloon. "They have the jury," he told Lew. "They'll be ready for you in just a little while."

Lew nodded and Carey went out. From across the street, Clay Russell, an old hellion who had lived in the shadow of a noose for fifty years, came clumping across the street, heading for the saloon door. Lew tossed away his cigarette and stepped outside.

Russell, watching from under shaggy brows, stopped, the sun laying it's light along his brown, blocky jaw. "Listen, Lew," he said. "You've dodged the issue on this thing. You would never say aye or no. But my boy's up there, and whether they hang him or not depends on what you say. So you say that Howell had a gun and that he tried to kill Tracy!"

"That's a threat, isn't it, Clay?"

"That's a threat," Clay declared vehemently. "Tracy had to kill him. That's what Tracy said, and if you say different it'll prove you've sold out to Lassiter. If you say different on the witness stand, I'll kill you right then. Understand?"

"That's plain enough for anybody," Lew admitted.

"I want it to be plain as hell. I want it to stick out like the nose on yore face!" Clay snapped.

* * *

RUSSELL stomped away, rusty spurs clanking. Up the street, Lew could see a lot of people staring at him. Big, arrogant, silver-

haired Clark Lassiter, backed by two gunmen, stepped away from in front of the General Store. He stopped Lew when Barbour came abreast of him.

"I saw you talkin' to Russell," he said. "That don't look so damned good for you, Lew."

"Don't it?"

Lassister shook his head. He said definitely, "It don't, because the Russells are a pack of cow-stealers. If you don't say Tracy Russell is a murderer when you get on the stand, it'll prove you're one of 'em. I'd advise you to pin the deadwood on Tracy. If you do, you can live here and prosper. If you don't . . . " Lassiter paused suggestively. "Mebby you can guess what could happen."

"Lots of things could happen, Lassiter," Lew admitted.

Lassiter nodded emphatically. "A hell of a lot of things could happen. I—"

"Lew! Come on!" Carey called from up street.

"They want me now," Lew said to Lassiter.

"Remember what I said," the cowman said. Then Lassiter and his henchmen turned away.

Lew went on up the street and walked into the courtroom. Clay Russell with three gunmen, Hooper, Ives and Carr, was there. Lassiter filed in behind Lew, with Hood and Bemis, his two men. That feeling which had pervaded him before, down in the saloon, came to Lew again as he went up to the witness stand. It was something he could see in people's eyes, an intangible thing that made him feel that he, Lew Barbour, was on trial instead of Tracy Russell.

When they asked him to, Lew raised his hand and swore to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Mary Lassiter, sitting beside her father, looked at him and smiled. But her smile was wan, hesitant, and that elusive something was in Mary Lassiter's eyes too, as though she expected him to say something she wanted to hear; something important to her and to him.

The lawyer began to talk, but Lew kept watching Mary Lassiter, thinking of their engagement, of the fact that Lassiter had threatened him, saying that if he pinned the deadwood on Tracy he could prosper. God knew he wanted to prosper. . . .

"As I understand it, you saw Tracy Russell kill Pete Howell?" the lawyer asked Lew.

"Yes. I saw it."

"Tell us how you saw it and what you saw."

The courtroom was still as death.

"Tracy and Pete were in the back room at the saloon," Lew said. "There'd been a card game there, I guess, and Tracy and Pete were the last to leave. I'd left some saddle gear with Hawkins, the saddle man, who has his shop down the street. I had to go past the window of that back room to get to his place. When I got to the window I heard Tracy talking to Pete."

Hesitating, Lew looked at Mary Lassiter's face. It was pale.

"All right," the lawyer prompted. "Go ahead. What did you hear? What did you see?"

"Tracy said to Pete," Lew went on, " 'Pete, you've been a dirty crook all your life. You're in a spot. You're in no position to tell me what to do.' "

From back near the door, Clark Lassiter blurted, "I can see how this is going to turn out! Why would a low-down Russell tell a cowhand of mine that he was crooked?"

"Mebby he was!" Clay Russell barked. "An' who's a low—"

The judge pounded with his gavel again. Lew waited till the noise subsided, then went on. "Tracy and Pete argued. Tracy told Pete that he could go to hell for all of him. Tracy turned to leave the room and when he did Pete made a grab at a

drawer in a desk that stood behind him. He pulled a gun from it and the noise of the drawer opening made Tracy turn around. He got his gun out and shot Pete before Pete could get his gun clear up out of the drawer."

"That's right!" Tracy Russell shouted from the prisoner's seat. "That's the way it happened! By God, the man told the truth!"

Old Clay Russell had turned and was watching the rage and frustration on Clark Lassiter's face with enjoyment. Mary Lassiter's face was white as death. Disappointment and tragedy were in her dark eyes. A lot of the folks out there in the courtroom looked at Lew Barbour as though he were a Judas.

"How do you account," the lawyer inquired coldly, "for the fact that Pete Howell had no gun when his body was found?"

Lew shook his head. "I don't account for it. It's not my business to account for it. I told you the truth. That's all there is to it."

"Damn' right that's all there is to it!" blared Clay Russell. "One of Lassiter's men swiped Pete's gun. He's always tried to pin something onto me, the damned old—"

"Shut up, Russell!" the judge yelled, rapping hard with his gavel. He threw a withering glance at Barbour. "Case dismissed," he said.

Lew waited until the courtroom cleared. Then he went out and down to the saloon, where his horse was tied. Nobody spoke to him enroute. The air was filled with that queer antagonism, that intangible thing that made him feel like an alien in Arapahoe. That feeling was enough to make a man shiver.

Lassiter, big and brown-faced, the silver of his hair glistening beneath the broad brim of a black hat, drove down the street with Mary beside him on the buckboard seat.

He stopped in front of Lew. Mary looked at Lew and extended her hand. As Lew stepped forward, she said in a low, bitter voice. "I didn't think you'd do it, Lew."

She dropped a diamond engagement ring into Lew's hand. Lassiter drove on. Clay Russell, astride a big, black horse, followed by Hooper, Ives, Carr and Tracy, galloped down the street, a grim smile on his lips. Clay pulled his black up to a buck-jumping halt before Lew.

"For a while I thought you was gonna let me down, mister!" he boomed. "But you're all right. If you ever need a Lassiter killed, just let me know!"

Face burning, rage and bewilderment in him, Lew watched them thunder on recklessly. Tracy whipped out a gun and began shooting exuberantly at the sky as they left town. Lew turned slowly and looked into the face of young Bud Howell —Pete's brother. Bud's face was white. Red rage and hate was in his flaming eyes.

"You damned liar!" he sobbed. "You sold out to Clay Russell! I'll kill you for that, just like I'll kill Tracy Russell!"

CHAPTER TWO

Boothill For a Lawman

FOR a dazed second, surprise held Lew Barbour motionless. Then Bud moved. His gun swung up, and Lew weaved sidewise. The Colt blasted almost in his face as he brought his own pistol arcing down. Almost blinded by the muzzle blast, he peered at the crumpled form of Bud Howell, wiped at his eyes to rid them of the powder film. He stooped and took the younker's weapon from the ground and tossed it aside.

To the cold-eyed onlookers he said hotly, "Some of you better see that this young fool goes home and gets some sense

in his head. He's liable to get hurt."

He went down to the bank. Inside he spoke to Bartlett, the president. "Those cattle you were going to take for the note that's due. I'm ready to drive them in."

Bartlett's white face, stony from the moment Lew had entered, jellied back and forth as he shook his head. "I've changed my mind. Can't handle the cattle. Get me the money."

Lew frowned. "That don't leave me much time. I doubt if I can do it."

"If you can't do it," Bartlett shugged, "then I take all the the cattle. All the grazing stock on your range are mortgaged to cover the note."

A flush of anger came into Lew's face. "I begin to see what's up," he said. "It smells like two skunks—you and Lassiter!"

Bartlett smiled, bent his head over a book and began to write in it.

Lew went out and walked stiffly up the street to the railroad station. Of the station agent he inquired, "How long will it take to get me some cattle cars for about three hundred head to be shipped east—to St. Louis?"

Confusion jumped into the man's eyes. "Well, you see," he mumbled, "there's a tie-up in cars. I don't know. I—maybe . . . " He stopped. Lew studied him. Then: "So Lassiter got to you, too!"

"Lassiter?" The agent tried to look surprised. But there was guilt in his eyes.

Lew said contemptuously, "I hate a man who don't have the guts to tell the truth."

He went out, got his horse and rode across the hills to his ranch. He didn't unsaddle. He just ground-tied his pony and hunkered on the porch and stared out on the flats, where his cattle grazed. He reckoned the idea of sending cattle to Saint Louis was crazy anyway, because the note was due tomorrow. He wouldn't have had time, even if he could have gotten cars. Bartlett and Lassiter had bought off the agent simply to keep the stock here, so they could all be grabbed. It was a dirty frame-up. And Lassiter had the guts to squawk about Russell.

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did — Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do — well — there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering — and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well — this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be — all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 1069, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was. — Advt. Copyright, 1940, Frank B. Robinson.

A rider pounded through the dusk toward the ranch—Tracy Russell. Tracy's face was white, with deep lines of dissipation etched in it. His eyes, blood-shot and calculating, held a reckless light. His breath reeked of stale corn whiskey as he dismounted and stood near Lew, staring at him. Finally he extended a package of bills in one hand.

Lew frowned, stared at the money, then at Russell.

"Take it," Tracy said. "It's five thousand bucks. I hear you need money. If you don't get it, Bartlett takes all your cattle."

Lew shook his head. "I don't need that much," he said. "And I can't take it anyway. I couldn't pay it back. Lassiter and Bartlett have me fixed so I can't make any dinero. They have me hooked. I can't sell cattle here. I can't get cars to ship in. So you'd lose your money."

Russell's eyes looked a little puzzled. "I *want* to lose the money," he said. "I ain't loanin' it to you. I'm *givin'* it to you. You told the truth at the trial. If you hadn't done that, I'd have had my neck stretched. Take the money. There's only one string to it."

"String?" But Barbour didn't give a damn what kind of a string went with it. He couldn't take the money anyhow.

Tracy nodded. "That you don't never tell the old man, or any of his men that I give it to you. You see—it wasn't their neck they was fittin' a rope for. They don't sabe how I felt in a cell."

He gave an impatient shake to his hand, jiggled the money. "Here."

Lew stood up. "You don't sabe, Tracy," he said. "I told the truth because it was the truth. If Pete Howell *hadn't* had a gun I'd have told that, just like I told that he *did* have one."

Slowly, Tracy shoved the money inside his shirt. He frowned. "You still saved my neck from a damn good stretchin'," he said slowly. "I'll remember that."

HE CLIMBED on his horse and spurred it cruelly, making the critter leap wildly as he turned it about and rode away into the darkness that had crept out from the hills.

The moon came up, but Lew still sat there, his mind full of Mary Lassiter, of the ring she had handed him, of the accusation in her eyes. He kept telling himself there'd be a way to beat this thing—and yet he knew there wasn't any way. He was sunk, whipped, hog-tied and throwed.

Off in the distance he heard the faint bawling of cattle, the whisper of hoofbeats. The bawling became louder, the hoofbeats more insistent. Lew got slowly to his feet. Frowning, he mounted and rode swiftly out onto the flats.

He could see his cattle moving—with riders behind them. The cattle were a great sea moving southward, toward the pass to Mexico. A gun blazed, the men yelled and the cattle broke into a run.

Lew dragged a pistol from its holster and dashed forward. His Colt crashed at a fleeting form. He missed, but the shot stirred more riders from the other side of the cattle. A rifle suddenly went into action and Lew's horse went down as though pole-axed. As he fell, Barbour saw Tracy Russell racing away in the wake of the cattle.

By the time Lew had picked himself up, the rumble of the cattle's hoofs was thunder in the air; the dust was high and billowing, a great yellow cloud in the moon-silvered sky. Barbour stood there and cursed Tracy Russell, Clay Russell and all their damned outfit. He damned them to hell, then knew it made little difference that they had taken the stock. Bartlett would have gotten them anyway.

Through the now silent night, Lew limped back toward the ranch, his heavy saddle on his shoulder. He still told himself they couldn't whip him. He could

borrow money from another bank, somewhere else, and make another start. But that wouldn't work either. The knowledge hit him suddenly that his place was a government homestead, and he wouldn't have title to it for another year. Bartlett would still hold him to that old note—all the grazing stock on his land for a thousand dollars. And now he *had* no grazing stock. He had no security for a loan.

No sleep came to him that night. He thought of all the things he had planned, then had been forced to watch crumple like a house of cards. He thought of many ways to satisfy Bartlett's note, but none would work. . . .

It was not long after dawn that the sound of hoofbeats in the yard brought Lew to the window. Sheriff Wills, Deputy Carey and Bartlett were outside.

When Barbour appeared in the door Bartlett asked, "Where's your cattle? We rode all across your range and didn't see any."

A grim sense of satisfaction was in Lew when he spoke. "All my cattle were rustled last night. I think the Russells took them. Help yourself, Bartlett, to all you find."

The banker stared at him for a long moment. Wills and Carey stared at him. Then Bartlett snapped, "Arrest him, Wills! I'll prefer charges against him for getting rid of mortgaged stock. Last night he said he had them. Today they're gone. I have a hunch we can make this stick, especially when he says the Russells took them!"

Suddenly Lew Barbour had a hunch they *could* make it stick. He recalled the cold stares of the folks in the courtroom when he had testified for Russell. He remembered the look of disdain the judge had thrown him. He didn't know why they hated him. Perhaps it was because he was a nester making good, perhaps because Lassiter didn't want him to marry his daughter. And it may have been because they thought that anybody who said a Russell wasn't a murderer was a damned liar. He only knew they hated him; knew any jury they'd get would send him to the pen.

"I think your hunch is a good one," Wills said gruffly. "Come on, Lew!"

Barbour nodded. He took a hat from a peg near the door, then said, "I'll saddle a horse."

With Wills watching, Lew went to the corral, saddled a pony, using the gear he'd carried in from the range. In the saddle-pocket was a gun. The gun bulged now under his knee as he swung into the saddle. Wills, Carey and Bartlett were in front of him, the latter two mounted. Wills was swinging up. When Wills was seated Lew's hand came out of the saddle pack, the gun in it. He quickly covered the trio.

"Now, listen!" Lew rasped. "Lassiter and Bartlett frame a deal so they can corral all my cattle for a measley thousand bucks. They fix it so I can't get cars to ship in. They fix it so I can't sell here. They got all excited because I wouldn't frame Tracy Russell, and showed their hand yesterday. Now all my cattle were stolen last night. If you think I'm going to let you frame me into jail because of that, take another think! It won't work!"

Banker Bartlett's face was pasty; uneasiness was in his eyes. But Wills and Carey grew stony-faced, resigned—and Lew knew they'd try to take him. Suddenly he jumped his horse forward, upsetting Carey, spilling him into the dust of the yard. Lew swiped at Wills' head with his gun and knocked the sheriff sidewise. Then he was racing away.

As he rounded the corral guns began to chatter. Something hot stung his side. He made the flats and headed for the hills. The sighting of the pursuing Wills and Carey was bad. All they did now was make a lot of noise.

Then Lew reached the hills and the

going got tough. The giant rocks gave him some protection as he dodged among them. A gun crashed suddenly, unexpectedly, up ahead. He turned and saw Carey, his arms thrown up as though seeking a hold on some invisible thing above him. Then the lawman fell from his saddle. He heard Wills yell.

Though he couldn't see Wills, Lew knew the sheriff had stopped. Abruptly the hills were quiet. Barbour stayed still, staring about for a sign of the hidden killer, a killer, he realized with sickening suddenness, who had made a murderer out of him! For Wills would swear that Lew Barbour had fired the shot that had torn Carey out of his saddle. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Triple Double-Cross

IN THE gray dawn that rose along the crooked river Tracy Russell was riding point on Lew Barbour's herd. Behind him came old Clay, Hooper, Ives, Carr and Mario Sanchez. As the cattle splashed across the Rio Grande Mario Sanchez grinned and said to Hooper. "Chihuahua! The dinero these cows will breeng!"

Hooper nodded, chortled, "Good stock. That Lew Barbour knew how to raise cows. I wonder, though, if we was wise to clean him out. Mebby he won't start again. Mebby we won't have anybody to blame this rustling on, now that he's lost some himself!"

Mario shrugged. "You cannot drink incessantly at a water hole unless there is rain to replenish it," he purred. "That is the way with our rustling back there. Sometime it would have to stop. Why not now, while we can get cattle like these?"

Carr, coming up with Clay Russell, called to Hooper and Sanchez, "Throw the critters in the pens. There's a fella here to buy 'em with plenty of dough."

Whooping and whirling their ropes and slapping them against their heavy leather chaps, they turned the cattle toward the pens near a small village at the river's edge. A Mexican, glorious in velvet and satin, smiled at Clay Russell.

"These are fine," he told the old man. "I will pay well for these."

Clay grinned. "The best you can steal, mister," he boasted. Then he went into an adobe with the Mexican while Tracy and the others shoved the cattle into the pens. As they finished, Clay came out of the hut, a sack in his hand. Sanchez threw a leg over the horn of his saddle, built himself a long, brown paper cigarette.

"I have been thinking, me," Sanchez mused. "This game is about over. Since Tracy has killed Pete Howell that Lassiter she will try harder then ever to get us. And since Lew Barbour has lost his cows the people they will know that it is not him, but us, who have been do theese stealing. It will be dangerous for us to go back there. Me, I think I will go down into Mexico. I would like my share now."

Clay frowned, then nodded. "Every man to his own way of thinking. Me, I say to hell with Lassiter."

"I reckon I'll take a ride with Sanchez, Clay," Hooper said.

"Me too, Clay," Carr chimed. "I don't hanker for a necktie party back there."

"I might as well make it unanimous," Ives said.

Clay Russell shrugged, counted out some gold pieces and put them in his pocket. He handed the sack to Sanchez. Looking at young Tracy, he ordered, "Shuck that moneybelt. Give these gents their divvy."

Tracy didn't move. His pale face was set and his eyes held strange lights. "I don't have it," he said.

Four heads whipped about to stare at him. "You don't have it?" Clay blurted.

"You—wouldn't leave it anywhere!"

Tracy was very still, his long-fingered hands near gun-butts.

"I've got the belt, but there's no money in it," he said. "Because I already gave the money to Lew Barbour. Bartlett was gonna take his cattle. Lassiter and Barbour framed a deal on him to squeeze him out, so he couldn't sell or ship any cattle. Bartlett was gonna grab everything he had. I didn't want that. He saved my bacon. He told the truth at the trial. He didn't want the money, but he took it, so I figured if we stole his cattle he'd reckon he had it coming. That's where it is."

Mario Sanchez was smiling. Carr and Ives and Hooper were staring at Tracy. "You got a nerve, you have," Carr growled.

"I didn't think you'd want to pull out," Tracy said. "I figured we'd keep on, and I'd make it up out of my shares."

That seemed to make no impression on them. Ives said, "If you think we'll stand for that you have another think comin'!"

Tracy breathed softly, "You can either stick and make some more, or you can go to hell!"

Ives said nothing. Carr said nothing. Mario Sanchez smiled. Old Clay Russell said regretfully, "I hate this. I hate it like hell. Personally, I wouldn't never have done it. But Tracy's my boy. I warn you, if there's a ruckus I'll have to side with Tracy."

"I have been thinking of that," Sanchez breathed.

"I've been thinkin' of it too, an' it makes no damn difference," Carr said.

Hooper, turning his head to look at Ives, asked, "What do you say, Ives?" But as he spoke he pulled a gun. It came out fast. He swung it on Clay Russell and the hogleg thundered before Clay could move a finger.

Carr whipped out a gun; Sanchez laughed and threw himself from his saddle, a Colt leaping into his hand as he hit the ground. Tracy yanked hard on his horse's reins. With one hand he turned it about, with the other he fired at Carr. But he missed, and the guns began to thunder and roar all at once. Tracy leaped forward, then swerved around the end of the cattle pens.

Carr and Ives started forward, but Hooper called to them. "Wait!" he bawled. "To hell with him. Let him go. He's hit, an' he'll die. Let's scoot back and see if Barbour has already paid the money to Bartlett. If he ain't, we'll take it."

They splashed into the river, then rode fast into the hills.

* * *

THE SUN was climbing above the peaks as they stopped and stared down at Lew Barbour's ranchhouse. Three riders were just pulling up in front of the place. Sheriff Wills, Carey and Bartlett.

"We're too late," Carr cursed. "There's Bartlett now. Barbour will give him the money."

"Any law against takin' money from a banker?" Ives argued.

As they lay there, peering through the brush, Barbour came to the door. He talked to Wills and Bartlett and Carey. But he handed them nothing.

"He seems to be stallin!" Carr said softly.

Lew came out and saddled a horse. He mounted, and Wills climbed into his saddle. A gun glinted in the light, in Lew Barbour's hand. He whirled his horse, upsetting Carey and striking Wills with a gun barrel. Then he was racing for the hills, Wills and Carey after him. The banker stayed in the ranchyard.

"Somethin' queer has happened," Hooper said. "I wonder why he didn't pay off."

"If he comes this way we'll find out."

Barbour came closer, his pursuers firing steadily at him. He gained the hills, then dodged behind rocks. Carey, behind him, stopped, drew a bead on him. Ives fired at Carey. "We wanna save him," he said softly. "He's got five thousand bucks."

The hills were quiet, except for the sheriff's wrathful voice as he cursed Lew Barbour. Then Ives called out, "Okay, Wills. We have him covered. Throw down your gun, Lew!"

Lew swiveled his head, saw Ives standing beside a giant rock. He heard Wills coming, saw Carr and Mario Sanchez step out, grinning, wicked lights in their eyes. He dropped his gun. Wills, anger in his eyes, came up. "Where's Clay and Tracy?" he asked.

Mario chuckled. "Clay, he is dead. Tracy is maybe dead, *tambien.*"

"Tracy Russell got soft-hearted over Lew here," Hooper explained. "He took five thousand bucks of our money and gave it to Lew to pay off Bartlett. Tracy talked big and Clay sided with him."

Wills' brow wrinkled, his eyes grew puzzled. He said, "Huh. Lew didn't give the money to Bartlett."

"Mebby he figured his cattle wouldn't bring five thousand anywhere else," Ives ventured. "Mebby with the fix Lassiter and Bartlett put him in, he figured he'd rather have the money than pay off a note."

"Search him," Wills suggested.

After Ives searched him, Lew said, "I begin to smell a mouse. You cow-stealing skunks are pretty thick with Wills. Why?"

Hooper chuckled. "Did you ever wonder why Lassiter could never pin the deadwood on Russell? If you did, it was because Wills worked with Russell. He got a split on all we made. He steered Lassiter wrong. He made it seem like it was you that did the rustling, not us. Now, mebby you know we mean business. Where's the five thousand?"

Lew laughed, "Tracy told you a whopper!"

They exchanged questioning glances. Then Ives said, "Tracy is everything but a liar. I think he gave it to you."

Lew shrugged and Ives stepped close and slapped him across the face with his open hand. "Five thousand," he gritted, "is a lot of money. We'll go a long way to get it!"

Eyes flaming, Lew promised coldly, "Lay a hand on me again and I'll knock your head off!"

Ives laughed contemptuously, slapped him hard again, a stinging blow that rocked Lew's head sidewise. Lew's fist came up and cracked on Ives' jaw. Tumbled awkwardly backward.

Carr, stepping in, smiled wickedly and said coldly, "Now, mister, I'll work on you. But I promise you—raise a hand and I'll kill you!"

He stepped forward, quick, lithe, hit Lew hard. Lew rocked backward, off balance. Carr laughed when Lew didn't strike back. "Where is it, mister?" he asked.

He kept hitting Lew and Lew kept staggering back. Finally Lew cracked. He hit Carr a terrific jolt on the jaw. Carr reeled back, his hand whipping to his gun. Lew leaped for a rock and a bullet threw granite splinters in his face as he dove behind it.

"Nail him!" Carr yelled. "Don't let him get away!"

CHAPTER FOUR

Last Chance Sixgun

ALL THE guns opened up and something as heavy as a sledge hammer struck Lew in the back. He fell flat on his face, then rolled into a ravine and out of sight. Weak, sick and dizzy, he crawled a long way down the

(Continued on page 105)

The racing horsemen were drawing closer, the riders yelling and firing as they came on.

MASSACRE AT CEMETERY LANDING

By JAMES P. WEBB

Starving Jerry Moran rode toward Bullet Crossing, unaware that the credentials for the job he needed in order to stay alive were merely so many tickets—to a muddy river grave!

JERRY MORAN halted his horse at the edge of Bullet River. In the faint gray light of the approaching dawn he could see the dark bulk of the ferry moored at the opposite bank, and the buildings of the stage station just beyond. But he could see no indication that anybody was stirring over there.

Moran took a short briar pipe from his coat pocket and chewed the stem reflectively while he tried to decide what to do next. Maybe it would be a good idea to raise a yell and call the ferry over at once, before the station attendants had time to shake the sleep from their brains. Perhaps, if he took them by surprise, he'd get across the river before Finn Wheeler became suspicious of him. On the other hand. . . .

Moran reined the bay horse around and rode back up the trail about a hundred yards, where he pulled into the brush and dismounted. On the other hand, it might be wiser to wait. . . .

Moran laid an arm across the flat saddle and chewed the stem of his empty pipe. It would make waiting easier, he thought, if he could smoke. But you can't smoke without tobacco, and he had neither tobacco, money nor food. He had only a tough body, an iron nerve, a few more loads for his heavy Navy revolver, and a job—if he could take it!

Maybe William Strudd, the division superintendent who had offered him this job, would have fed him and filled his tobacco pouch if Moran had mentioned his need. Almost certainly he would have loaned him powder, some .44 calibre bullets, and a few percussion caps for the Navy revolver. But Moran had asked only for a job.

Trying to forget his empty stomach, he began pacing slowly back and forth along the hardpan stage road, while cactus, sagebrush and chaparral gradually took form about him as the light grew stronger. Presently he went back to his horse, untied the reins from a low scrub oak, and mounted.

Moran was about to swing out of the brush into the trail when he caught the sound of an approaching stagecoach. An instant later a Concord whipped around a bend in the road and came lurching down toward the ferry landing, the six horses running hard. A guard on the box was on his knees and facing backward, aiming his weapon across the top of the coach. Four riders rounded the shoulder of the hill in hot pursuit, their pistols popping.

The driver's long whip cracked above the horses' backs, and a lusty yell, loud as a bugle call, rang from the jehu's throat. Moran knew that the driver was calling desperately for the ferry; and he suspected that the boat was still on the other side of the river.

Moran knew, because William Strudd had told him, that the ferry should be waiting when the stage was due. There had been too many robberies committed at Bullet River Crossing since Finn Wheeler had been in charge of the station and the ferry. In most holdups, the bandits had chased the coach to the water's edge, and had been able to corner it there because the ferry was always on the wrong side of the river at such times.

Moran saw the driver begin sawing the lines; saw the reckless speed of the swaying coach diminish. He knew now for certain that the scow was still across the river. The racing horsemen were drawing closer, the riders yelling and firing as they came on.

Moran pushed back the tail of his coat, pulled the Navy revolver from the holster and thumbed back the hammer. He cursed under his breath as he remembered the scantiness of his ammunition. The next instant he had lined the long barrel on the foremost bandit and pressed the trigger. The road-agent lurched in the saddle and grabbed at the pommel. The four reined up and peered around, trying to locate the origin of the attack.

* * *

MORAN fired again, and a horse went down. The rider sprang clear, wheeled, and leaped up behind one of his companions. The bandits,

in confusion, swung their mounts around and spurred back the way they had come.

Moran rode out into the trail and saw the stage horses plunging and rearing at the edge of the river. The leaders brought their forefeet down into the mire of the ferry landing, and the coach rocked to a halt. Moran paused to recharge the two empty chambers of his revolver and put caps on the nipples, then rode down and halted beside the coach.

From the opposite bank, the ferry was moving slowly out on the stream, a huge, black-bearded man handling the oar.

"Who's that?" Moran asked.

The express messenger was recharging his gun. "Finn Wheeler," he said. "Agent in charge of Bullet River station. There's talk that he's been fired and won't quit. The ferry and all the supplies at the station belong to the stage and express people, and it looks a little odd they can't fire an agent if they want to."

"They can," the driver offered. "And they will. But I'd hate to try and take his place if he didn't want to leave."

Yes, Moran thought grimly, it was a dangerous proposition. Strudd had told him that another man had been sent, armed with the same kind of papers that Moran had, to take Wheeler's place. That man had disappeared!

Strudd had told him that Wheeler was suspected of harboring road-agents, of working with them, and of appropriating company property to swell his own wealth. Strudd had made it clear to Moran that he might encounter difficulties if he accepted the job at Bullet River Crossing. But to Jerry Moran difficulty and peril had never been strangers, and a man must eat.

The ferry touched shore, and Wheeler snubbed the line to a heavy stake driven deep into the bank. Moran waited until the coach was safely aboard; then he swung down from the saddle and led his horse on to the boat. He was conscious of the bearded ferryman's hard stare. There was already a gleam of unfriendliness in Wheeler's sullen black eyes.

There was no conversation while the ferry was crossing, and Moran figured that neither the jehu nor the messenger liked Wheeler. There were no passengers on the stage.

The crude boat touched shore, slid its prow up on the muddy landing. A hostler, who had brought fresh horses up from the corral to the front of the station, had come down to the water's edge. He grabbed the anchor-chain and made it fast to a post. Wheeler let the end-gate fall with a clanking *splat* in the mire, and thus made a platform from the ferry to the firmer ground of the road.

Then Wheeler spoke, his voice gruff. "I heard shootin'. What was it?"

The driver, a grizzled veteran, answered shortly, "Road-agents. If the ferry'd been on the other side, we coulda got away from 'em, maybe."

Wheeler's lip lifted, exposing his teeth through a gap in his black beard. "You got away, anyhow, didn't you?"

"Yep," the driver said. "But it was just luck we did. Some gent cut in with a gun from the brush. He—" The driver broke off suddenly and leaned to glance down at Moran. "Say! Where'd *you* hail from? Was it you that—"

"No," Moran said quickly. "I just happened along in time to catch the ferry. I met some hombres down the road."

He saw suspicion flare in Wheeler's black eyes, and knew that the man didn't believe him.

The jehu drove the stage off the ferry and rolled up in front of the mess house. Baldy Benton, the cook, appeared in the kitchen doorway and watched Moran ride up and dismount. Baldy had been a sea-cook in his time, and nobody ever knew what had lured him to Bullet River.

Moran glanced around at the buildings. Mess house and kitchen, barn and corral,

and a long bunkhouse formed three sides of a square. He heard Wheeler and the hostler behind him and turned slowly, dropping the bridle reins.

"Put my horse up and feed him," he said, looking straight at the hostler and ignoring Wheeler. "I'll be here a while, I reckon."

The hostler, a tall, thin young man named French, nodded and did not say anything. Moran switched his glance to Wheeler, who was looking intently at the stagecoach; then he turned and followed the jehu and the messenger into the mess house.

A few minutes later, when bacon and eggs and coffee were set before him, he fell to and ate ravenously. He was so intent on the food that he was only vaguely aware of the departure of the stagecoach.

* * *

THIS was the first time Moran had tasted food in twenty-four hours. It was not the first time he had gone hungry, he reflected bitterly, and probably wouldn't be the last. As a mere boy, he had been a Forty-niner, crossing the plains with his father in a wagon-train. His old man had hoped to find gold in California, but had been killed by Indians before the train reached bonanza-land.

Moran had been cared for by other members of the train and had reached California, where he had stayed about five years. Then he had made a sea trip to Panama and back, after which he fell in with a party of fur trappers. Lately he had been in Alder Gulch, snowbound in Virginia City, but he had found little gold.

Heading south, his luck had grown worse and worse. Penniless, he had asked William Strudd for a staging job, and had been told to take over the station and ferry at Bullet River Crossing. He was only twenty-four, but he had lived through a lifetime of adventure, pressed down and running over. Hardship and danger had etched lines on his lean face.

"You eat like a hungry man, matey," Benton said.

Moran looked up with a start to find the cook standing beside his chair. "I *was* hungry," he said.

He leaned back and took his pipe from a coat pocket. Then he brought out a leather tobacco pouch and looked at it ruefully.

"Empty," he said.

The cook reached out and took the pouch. "Give it here and I'll fill it up." He disappeared through a rear doorway.

Moran stared at the man's back. Benton had short legs and a stocky body. He walked with a rolling gait, and his head and shoulders pitched sidewise with each step. How loyal would he be to Wheeler when the showdown came?

Moran sat where he was until the cook returned with the filled pouch. Then he stuffed tobacco into his pipe and lighted it with a sulphur match.

"Thanks," he said.

"Nothin' like a pipe to rest a man's mind." Benton winked one round eye. "Well, I'm gettin' back to the galley, mate. Don't let the redskins get you."

"I won't," Moran said. "I'm stayin' here." He watched the short cook waddle out of the room.

A footstep caused him to turn his head. Finn Wheeler was coming up behind him, his eyes narrow and intent in his bearded face; but when Moran turned, the big man swerved around the table and sat down at the opposite side.

Wheeler rested his massive forearms on the rough boards and stared at Moran. "Them road-agents," he said softly, "may not like what you done. If they happened to drift along here, it'd be better if you was gone."

Moran took the pipe from his mouth

(Continued on page 92)

FOR 3¢ A DAY

HERE'S WHAT YOU GET

IN THIS NEW

SICKNESS-ACCIDENT POLICY

$100.00

a month for sickness or accident disability.

$1,000.00

for accidental loss of limbs or sight.

$1,000.00

for accidental death

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION

10-DAY
FREE INSPECTION!

Under a liberal free inspection offer, you can read all the provisions and benefits of this policy *before you pay one cent.*

Remember! Up to $100 a month for 12 months for disability from accident—up to $100 a month for three months for sickness—$50 for hospital care in accidental injury—$1,000 for loss of life, or loss of limbs or sight—and other important benefits!

This excellent protection against loss of time and income—in case of sickness or accident—is offered by Postal Life & Casualty Insurance Company of Kansas City, an old line legal reserve company which has served more than a QUARTER-MILLION policyholders in the last 14 years.

Over $1,000,000.00 Cash Benefits Have Already Been Paid.

Postal policyholders have received over 1 million dollars in cash benefits.

NO AGENT WILL CALL! MONEY TO SEND!

MAIL COUPON TODAY

POSTAL LIFE & CASUALTY INSURANCE CO.
472 Postal Life Bldg. Kansas City, Mo.

Fill in and mail this coupon, and a sample policy will be mailed you for FREE INSPECTION, without any obligation whatsoever.

NAME .....

STREET ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

AGE ..... OCCUPATION .....

NAME OF BENEFICIARY .....

(Continued from page 90)

and smiled. "I can't go," he said quietly. "I'm the new agent here."

He knocked the pipe against the edge of the table. Then he took two folded papers from the inside pocket of his coat and spread them out, upside down to himself, on the table.

Wheeler's sultry eyes clung for an instant longer to Moran's face, then shifted to study the papers. Both were signed by William Strudd, division agent of the Overland. One told Wheeler that he was fired; the other made known to all concerned that J. Moran was his successor.

A low muttering sound started in Wheeler's throat and rose suddenly to a roar.

"Get out of here!" he bawled suddenly.

Moran smiled thinly. "You're the one that's gettin' out."

Wheeler heaved his huge body up. He glared at Moran and his big hands opened and closed. "I'll break every bone in your body," he growled.

Moran stood up, kicking aside his chair. He moved slowly sidewise until he was clear of the tables.

"I suppose we'll have to get that part of it over with," he said, "but you're not gettin' your hands on me." His fingers were on the butt of his Navy revolver, and his eyes were bleak and watchful.

Moran saw the rage fade from Wheeler's eyes; he saw cunning take its place. He glanced quickly at the front door. Nobody was there, but it seemed to Moran that the station-keeper must have sensed an advantage.

Wheeler moved around the table.

"Moran," he said, in a wheedling tone, "I've been here a good while, and I hate to leave. Strudd's got me all wrong. I've been a good agent. Let's you and me talk this over."

"There's nothing for us to talk over," Moran said. "Either you're goin' to make trouble, or you ain't."

"I'm not makin' trouble. Come outside and I'll show you somethin'."

Wheeler backed away, swinging toward the front door, and Moran followed slowly, wondering. This was not what Moran had expected. He didn't understand what Wheeler was up to.

Then a voice from the back door said sharply, "Hoist 'em, lubber!"

* * *

MORAN cursed under his breath. He shoved his hands up past his shoulders and turned half around to look back. The cook stood in the doorway with a shotgun in his hands.

"So you're in it, too?" Moran said, harshly.

"I'm workin' for the skipper, there," Baldy Benton said, indicating Finn Wheeler with a slight motion of the shotgun barrel. "You're sailin' against the wind, mate."

"I'm the new agent here," Moran said. "Wheeler won't go away peacefully, but he's fired. You'd better—"

He had put too much of his attention on the cook. Wheeler lunged forward, his big fist lashing out. Moran tried to dodge, but the blow caught him on the angle of the jaw and he went down.

Dazed, Moran struggled to his feet. Wheeler sprang forward and kicked out viciously. Moran side-stepped, and one sinewy hand leaped at the flying foot. He heaved, and Wheeler crashed to the floor on his back. He lay still.

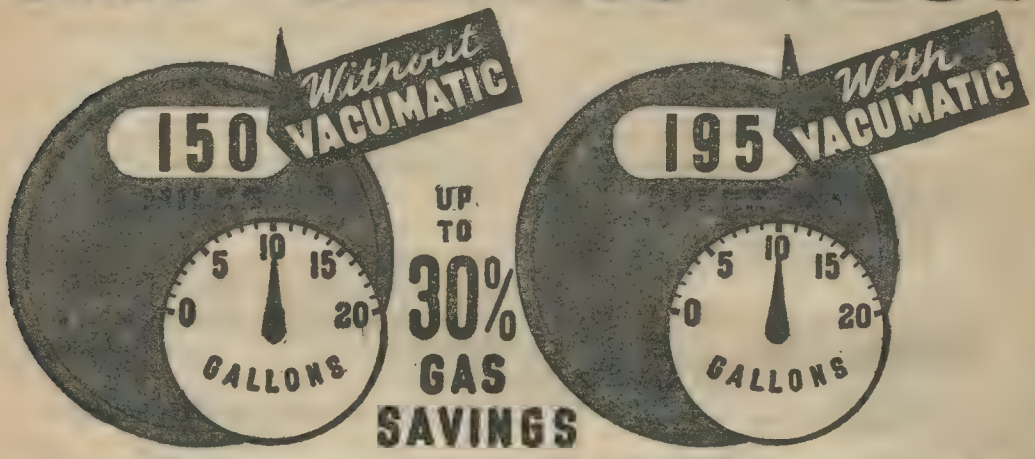
French, the hostler, appeared in the front doorway. Moran dropped to one knee, jerked his gun, and thumbed the hammer. The hostler lurched backward out of the doorway, but Moran knew that he was not hit. He twisted around to look at Benton. The cook had advanced several steps, and his shotgun was thrust forward, but he couldn't fire at Moran with-

(Continued on page 94)

MOTORISTS *Wanted!*

TO MAKE THIS *UNIQUE* ....

GAS SAVING TEST



Car Owners: You are invited to make a gas saving road test with the Vacu-matic on your own car, with the absolute understanding that unless it proves to you that it will save you up to 30% on gas and improve your car performance, the test will cost you nothing. Investigate this remarkable discovery that trims dollars off gasoline bills—gives you worthwhile gas savings—more power—greater speed—quicker pickup—faster acceleration.

Automatic Supercharge Principle

Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* It operates on the supercharge principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely automatic and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing *automatically* to save dollars on gas costs.

Proven By Test

In addition to establishing new mileage records on cars in all sections of the country, the Vacu-matic has proven itself on thousands of road tests and on dynamometer tests which duplicate road conditions and record accurate mileage and horse power increases.

Fits All Cars—Easy to Install

Vacu-matic is constructed of six parts assembled and fused into one unit, adjusted and *sealed at the factory.* Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can install in ten minutes. The free offer coupon will bring all the facts. Mail it today!

The Vacu-matic Co., Wauwatosa, Wis.

Sworn Proof of Gas Savings

This certifies that I have carefully read 300 original letters received from Vacu-matic users testifying to gas savings up to 30%, many reporting added power, smoother running, and quicker pick-up. These letters are just a small part of the larger file of enthusiastic user letters that I saw at the company offices.

Signed ..... Notary Public

AGENTS Get Yours FREE For Introducing

Vacu-matic offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Every car, truck, tractor, and motorcycle owner a prospect. Valuable territories now being assigned. If you help us introduce it to a friend, you can obtain your own free. Check and mail coupon today.

SEND THIS *Free Offer* COUPON

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY
7617-612 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.

Please send full particulars about VACU-MATIC, also how I may obtain one for my own car FREE. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

☐ Check here if interested in Agency Proposition.

Help Kidneys If Back Aches

Do you feel older than you are or suffer from Getting Up Nights, Backache, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Dizziness, Swollen Ankles, Rheumatic Pains, Burning, scanty or frequent passages? If so, remember that your Kidneys are vital to your health and that these symptoms may be due to non-organic and non-systemic Kidney and Bladder troubles—in such cases CYSTEX (a physician's prescription) usually gives prompt and joyous relief by helping the Kidneys flush out poisonous excess acids and wastes. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose in trying Cystex. An iron-clad guarantee wrapped around each package assures a refund of your money on return of empty package unless fully satisfied. Don't take chances on any Kidney medicine that is not guaranteed. Don't delay. Get Cystex (Siss-tex) from your druggist today. Only 35c. The guarantee protects you.

Cystex
Helps Flush Kidneys

The HIT OF THE SEASON
FLYING CADET OXFORD
This sensational seller is just one of the many styled-to-the-minute numbers in the big, handsome new Moench catalogue, now ready. Dress shoes, safety shoes, garage shoes. 250 styles in all. Write today for best shoe line in America!
FREE SAMPLES
WE PAY POSTAGE
J. C. MOENCH SHOE CO.
BOSTON P-1 MASS

HAWKING
Loosen thick, sticky secretions causing hawking, coughing, stuffed-up nose. Ask your Druggist for HALL'S TWO-METHOD TREATMENT. Use the Expectorant and the soothing Nasal Ointment. Satisfaction or money back! Send postcard for FREE Health Chart TODAY!
F. J. CHENEY & CO. Dept. P, TOLEDO, OHIO

WILL YOU WEAR THIS SUIT and Make up to $12 in a Day!
● Let me send you a fine all-wool union tailored suit *FREE OF ONE PENNY COST.* Just follow my easy plan and show the suit to your friends. Make up to $12 in a day easily. *Partial Payment Plan. No experience—no house-to-house canvassing necessary.*
SEND FOR SAMPLES—FREE OF COST
Write today for FREE details. ACTUAL SAMPLES and "sure-fire" money-getting plans. Send no money.
H. J. COLLIN, PROGRESS TAILORING COMPANY
500 So. Throop Street, Dept. Z-196, Chicago, Illinois

EASY WAY....

Tints Hair JET BLACK
This remarkable CAKE discovery, TINTZ Jet Black Shampoo, washes out dirt, loose dandruff, grease, grime and safely gives hair a real smooth JET BLACK TINT that fairly glows with life and lustre. Don't put up with faded dull, burnt, off color hair a minute longer. TINTZ Jet Black Cake works gradual . . . each shampoo leaves your hair blacker, lovelier, softer, easier to manage. No dyed look. Won't hurt permanents. Full cake 50c (3 for $1). TINTZ comes in Jet Black, light, medium and dark Brown, Titian, and Blonde. Order today! State shade wanted.
SEND NO MONEY Just pay postman plus postage on our positive assurance of satisfaction in 7 days or your money back. (We Pay Postage if remittance comes with order.) Don't wait—Write today to
TINTZ COMPANY, Dept. 977, 207 N. MICHIGAN, CHICAGO.
CANADIAN OFFICE: Dept. 977, 22 COLLEGE STREET, TORONTO

(Continued from page 92)

out endangering the unconscious Wheeler.

"Stop where you are," Moran said bleakly, tipping up his gun.

The cook stopped. Moran turned toward the front. French was peering cautiously around the doorframe.

This was one of the closest places Moran had ever been in. He had to stay crouched over Wheeler to protect himself from Benton's shotgun. He had to make the cook keep his distance, and at the same time he had to watch French.

He swung around again and aimed the gun at Benton. "Back up," he said.

Scowling, Benton began to move backward. Moran glanced at French. The hostler had not moved, and only one sleeve was in sight. The cook walked steadily backward.

Moran looked down at Wheeler's face. If the cook got outside, even for an instant, Moran could get a table upended, use it for a shield, and stand off all three of them—until his ammunition ran out. A sharp crack on the skull with his gun barrel would insure that Wheeler didn't wake up too soon. Moran hated to hit an already unconscious man, but—he swung the long-barreled gun upward.

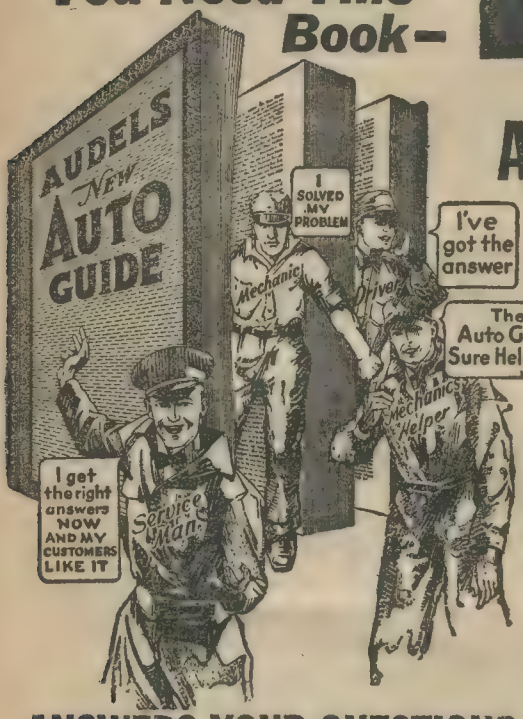
At that instant, Wheeler exploded into action. His hamlike fist thudded against the side of Moran's face, knocking him backward.

Wheeler came off the floor like a cyclone. Moran rolled, got up, ducked a wild swing, and struck at Wheeler's head with his gun barrel. Wheeler dodged, grabbed Moran's wrist, twisted. The gun clattered on the floor, and Moran drove his left fist hard against Wheeler's nose. Blood spurted, and Moran jerked his right hand free. He struck again, with all the power of his wide shoulders behind the blow, and Wheeler went down.

Moran knew that French and Benton

(Continued on page 96)

MECHANICS
You Need This Book—



Know! YOUR CAR

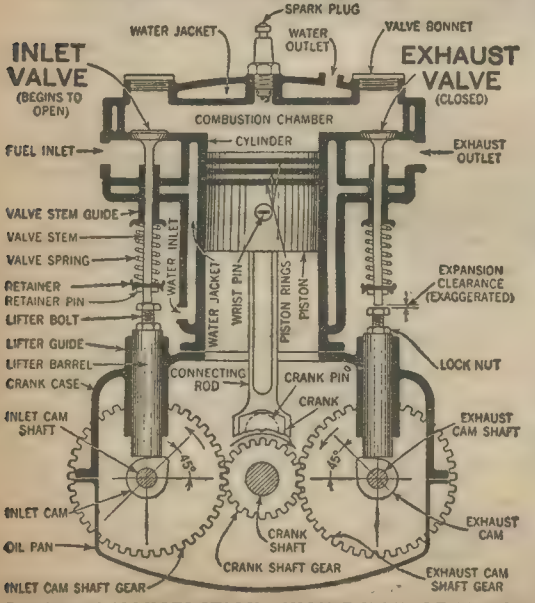
JUST OUT!
AUDELS NEW AUTO GUIDE

Audels New Automobile Guide is New from Cover to Cover. Contains all you need to know about the 1. Construction, 2. Operation, 3. Service, 4. Repair of Modern Motor Cars, Trucks, Buses and Diesel Engines. It contains Practical Information in a Handy Form—1540 Pages—1540 Illustrations. Written by an engineering authority and presented with forceful directness in PLAIN LANGUAGE and SIMPLE TERMS, generously illustrated. It is an up-to-date authoritative Book of Complete Instructions for all service jobs giving a New Vision of the automotive field. Covers the Entire Subject in Every Detail. Does Not Deal in Idle Theories, but gives Definite Directions telling Exactly What To Do and How To Do It. It is Packed Full with Important Information. Indispensable to Auto Mechanics, Service Men and Owners.

INSIDE VIEWS OF AUTOMOBILE PARTS FULLY ILLUSTRATED

The contents is Progressively Arranged; thus making it a Text Book and a Reference Book, to which you will refer again and again. This book completely covers the Parts of an Automobile—Automotive Physics—The Gas Engine—How a Gas Engine Works—Gas Engine Principles—Multi-Cylinder Engines—Horse Power—Automobile Engines—Engines: Stationary Parts—Engines: Moving Parts—Pistons—Piston Rings—Connecting Rods—Crank Shafts—The Valves—The Valve Gear—Cams and Cam Action—Valve Timing—Cooling Systems—Gasoline—Fuel Feed Systems—The Mixture—Carburetors—Automatic Choke—Super Chargers—Transmissions—Synchro-Mesh—Clutches—Universals and Propeller Shafts—The Differential—Rear Axles—The Running Gear—Brakes—Wheel Alignment—Knee Action—Steering Gear—Tires—Lubricants and Lubrication—Automotive Electricity—Ignition Systems—Magneto Ignition—Spark Plugs—Ignition Coils—Distributors—Automatic Spark Control—Ignition Timing—Generators—Starters—Generator and Starter Testing—Lighting Systems—Storage Batteries—Battery Charging—Battery Testing Troubles.

ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS



SPECIMEN ILLUSTRATION—INSIDE VIEW OF MOTOR

The 1540 Illustrations in this book are photographs of modern cars and mechanical drawings giving details for guidance. They explain all working parts and their functions. Alphabetical Index lists 55 interesting and instructive chapters with many sub-chapters—a big time saver.

TO GET THIS ASSISTANCE FOR YOURSELF SIMPLY FILL IN AND MAIL COUPON TODAY

$4 COMPLETE PAY ONLY **$1** A MO.

DIESEL ENGINES Fully Treated

If you are interested in the Construction, Operation or Maintenance of Modern Diesel Engines including the New 2 cycle Diesel this new book gives Practical, Useful Information. Contains over 100 pages on Diesel with many illustrations. All details thoroughly and clearly explained. These interesting pages will answer your Diesel questions—save fuel and operating trouble. Complete with all answers.

ASK TO SEE IT!

THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 West 23rd St., New York

Please send me postpaid AUDELS NEW AUTOMOBILE GUIDE ($4) for free examination. If I decide to keep it, I will send you $1 within 7 days; then remit $1 monthly until purchase price of $4 is paid. Otherwise, I will return it to you promptly.

Name_____

Address_____

Occupation_____

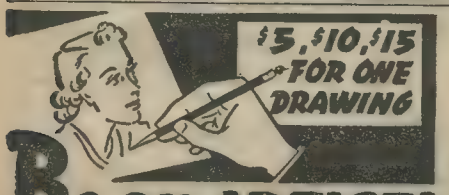
Reference_____ PHR

When the Itch of ECZEMA Drives You Mad DO THIS . . .

Use Poslam, as thousands do, it's a concentrated ointment that starts to work right away, no long waiting for results. Apply soothing Poslam Ointment to ease the burning torments of eczema—the price is small—the relief is great! All druggists.

FREE: Generous sample—write name and address to: Poslam, Dept. E-12, 254 W. 54th St., N. Y. C.

POSLAM A TESTED OINTMENT



Be an ARTIST!

—Train at Home in Your Spare Time

The fascinating field of Art offers commercial opportunities to men and women. COMMERCIAL ART. CARTOONING. ILLUSTRATING all in one complete course. Learn to draw step-by-step. Trained Artists are capable of earning $30, $50, $75 a week. TWO ART OUTFITS FURNISHED. Write for illustrated FREE BOOK. "Art for Pleasure and Profit." No obligation. State age.

FREE BOOK gives details

WASHINGTON SCHOOL of ART, Studio 9912T
1115 15th St., N. W. WASHINGTON, D. C.

BECOME AN EXPERT

ACCOUNTANT

Executive Accountants and C.P.A.'s earn $2,000 to $10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. About 20,000 Certified Public Accountants in the U. S. We train you thoroly at home in spare time for C.P.A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C.P.A.'s, including members of the American Institute of Accountants. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays."

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 12334-H, Chicago
A Correspondence Institution

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 8 x 10 inches or smaller if desired. Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture. Safe return of original photo guaranteed.

47c 3 for $1.00

SEND NO MONEY Just mail photo or snapshot (any size) and within a week you will receive your beautiful enlargement, guaranteed fadeless. Pay postman 47c plus postage—or send 42c with order and we pay postage. Big 16x20-inch enlargement sent C.O.D. 78c plus postage or send 80c and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer now. Send your photos today. Specify size wanted.

STANDARD ART STUDIOS, 113 S. Jefferson St., Dept. 581-W, Chicago

NOW a DYNAMIC HEAVY DUTY INDUSTRIAL WELDER for Only $19.95 RETAIL

WORKS Off 110-Volt Light Socket. This marvelous Dynamic Power Welder does the work of much higher priced types. It is easily portable. WELDS Cylinder Blocks, Bumpers, Fenders, Tanks, Farm Machinery, etc. Will also solder and braze on the lightest material. Works on iron, steel, tin, brass, copper and all other metals. Men without previous experience can make as much as $5.00 on a one hour repair job. In a year's time a Dynamic Welder COSTS YOU LESS THAN 6 CENTS A DAY

Instructions free—Open a welding shop now. AGENTS—Make big profits selling to garages, factories, janitors and machine shops. Write today for our 10-DAY TRIAL OFFER. DYNAMIC WELDER COMPANY, 2226-SF SILVERTON ROAD, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

NEW WESTERN MAGAZINE

(Continued from page 94)

were closing in. He glanced around, looking for his dropped gun. French, thin as a lath, was moving toward him cautiously.

A floorboard creaked, and Moran wheeled. He saw Benton slashing down with the barrel of the shotgun, and tried to dodge. Something seemed to explode inside his head. The world went black.

* * *

WHEN Moran struggled back to consciousness, he was lying on his side, and his head was aching fiercely. He opened one eye and saw that he was on the floor of the mess house, near where he had fallen. Behind him he heard the heavy voice of Finn Wheeler:

"I thought them four hombres would be hollerin' for the ferry before now. We'd better take Moran across the river and get rid of him before Baldy knows what's up. He's too damn squeamish."

"He'd be easy to take care of right where he's layin'," French said.

"No. We'll take him across the river. Then there won't be any sign of it here. Baldy won't have to know what happened, either."

French grabbed Moran under the knees, and Wheeler lifted him by the shoulders. Moran's head lolled and he let his muscles go lax, feigning unconsciousness.

Despite the pain in his head, Moran's brain was busy. He had learned a few things. Apparently the cook did not approve of murder. Wheeler and French were expecting four men, and Moran guessed that these were the gents who had tried to rob the stage.

They were half way to the ferry landing when Baldy shouted from the kitchen doorway: "Hey! What you goin' to do?"

"Takin' this hombre across the river," Wheeler bawled. "We'll be back soon."

(Continued on page 98)

IMAGINE THEIR JOY

WHEN THEY FOUND THEY COULD PLAY

This easy as A.B.C. way!

Plays on Radio

I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course.

*W. H. S., Alabama.

Learned Quickly at Home

I didn't dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. Now, when I play for people they hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time.

*H. C. S., Calif.

Wouldn't Take $1,000 for Course

The lessons are so simple that anyone can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course.

*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.

Surprised Friends

I want to say that my friends are greatly surprised at the different pieces I can already play. I am very happy to have chosen your method of learning.

*B. F., Bronx, N. Y.

Best Method by Far

Enclosed is my last examination sheet for my course in Tenor Banjo. This completes my course. I have taken lessons before under teachers, but my instructions with you were by far the best.

*A. O., Minn.

Thousands Have Learned to Play for as Little as 7c a Day

WHAT instrument would you like to play? We'll show you how you can learn to play it—quickly, easily, in spare time at home — for as little as SEVEN CENTS A DAY! Never mind if you don't know one note of music from another — don't worry about "special talent."

The truth of the matter is that *thousands now play who never thought they could!* Yes, men and women everywhere have discovered this amazingly easy way to learn music at home. Now they are enjoying the thrilling satisfaction of playing the piano, violin, guitar, saxophone or other favorite instrument. Some of them are playing in orchestras and over the radio; others are teaching music, making money in spare or full time. And thousands are having the time of their lives playing for their own enjoyment and the entertainment of their friends.

It all come about when they wrote to the U. S. School of Music for the Free Booklet and Print and Picture Sample that show you how EASY it is to learn music at home this modern way. No tedious scales, no tiresome exercises. You learn to play *by playing* — start right in almost at at once with the melody of a simple tune! It takes only a few minutes a day and the cost is trifling; you save the expense of a private teacher. Does it sound too good to be true? Mail the coupon and get the FREE PROOF! (Our forty-third year—Est. 1898.) U. S. School of Music, 36712 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. C., N. Y.

SEND FOR FREE PRINT AND PICTURE SAMPLE

● You'll open your eyes when you find how quickly and easily you can learn to play your favorite instrument. Don't doubt; don't hesitate. Send for the fascinating illustrated booklet that answers all your questions; let the free Print and Picture Sample show you how this method actually works. If interested, mail the coupon, NOW. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.)

* *Actual pupil's names on request. Pictures by professional models.*

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC
36712 Brunswick Bldg., New York City, N. Y.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument indicated below. Please send me your free booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home," and the free Print and Picture Sample.

Piano	Hawaiian Guitar	Trombone
Violin	Banjo	Flute
Guitar	Mandolin	Piccolo
Piano Accordion	Ukelele	Organ
Plain Accordion	Cornet	Drums and Traps
Saxophone	Trumpet	Modern Elementary Harmony
Voice		

Have You
Name ..... This Instru. ?.....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

☐ Check here if under 16 years of age.

INDIGESTION

may excite the Heart

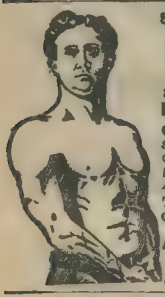
Gas trapped in the stomach or gullet may act like a hair-trigger on the heart. The heart is not hurt but it skips and races like mad. At the first sign of distress smart men and women depend on Bell-ans Tablets to set gas free. If the FIRST DOSE doesn't prove Bell-ans better, return bottle to us and receive DOUBLE Money Back. 25c all druggists.

CUT OUT AND MAIL THIS AD
FOR BIG $5 ASS'T
FOODS & PRODUCTS
FREE!

SEND NO MONEY!

Just cut out and mail this ad with your name and address for big $5.00 Assortment of full size packages of Foods, Groceries, Soaps, etc. — yours ABSOLUTELY FREE! Show products to friends, neighbors — earn big cash profits in full or spare time, taking orders for bargains in more than 200 home necessities. No experience needed. You don't pay us one cent. I supply everything — ABSOLUTELY FREE — to start you earning money including big $5.00 Assortment of actual Products and easy money-making plans. Cut this ad out NOW and mail it with your name and address for your big FREE Assortment.

ZANOL 3892 Monmouth Cincinnati, Ohio



Send for my 50c Course on how to develop

STRONG ARMS

and **BROAD SHOULDERS**

Now only 25c coin or 30c U. S. Stamps.

Contains 20 pages of illustrations showing and fully describing exercises that will quickly develop and make you gain strength in your Shoulders, Arms, Wrists, Hands and Fingers. This is really a valuable course of exercises, without apparatus.

25¢

ANTHONY BARKER

(doing business at this address for over 20 years.)

1235—6th Ave., (Office P), N. Y. City

INVENTORS

Delays are dangerous—Secure patent protection. Get new Free booklet, "How to Protect Your Invention." No charge for preliminary information. McMORROW AND BERMAN, Registered Patent Attorneys, 150-G Barrister Building, Washington, D.C.

SILK DRESSES

10¢

Coats $1.00; Shoes 50c; Hats 40c. Many other low-priced BARGAINS. FREE CATALOG. Send name on postcard. No obligation. Write today.

CROWN CO.

184 Monroe St. Dept. P.P. New York City

Free for Asthma During Winter

IF you suffer with those terrible attacks of Asthma when it is cold and damp; if raw, Wintry winds make you choke as if each gasp for breath was the very last; if restful sleep is impossible because of the struggle to breathe; if you feel the disease is slowly wearing your life away, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered for a lifetime and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address

Frontier Asthma Co. 24-J Frontier Bldg.
462 Niagara St., Buffalo, N. Y.

(Continued from page 96)

They stepped on to the ferry and dropped Moran like a sack of potatoes. He opened his eyes cautiously and found that he was lying at one side of the boat. The guard-rail was almost above him, and the uprights were far apart.

He heard the long oar splash water, and the ferry moved.

Wheeler chuckled. "I want to keep this job till I get a bigger pile. Somebody else can have it when I'm done with it, but not before."

"What'll you do if Strudd comes himself?" French asked.

"Just tell 'im I never saw either one of these hombres, nor heard anything about me bein' fired. Maybe you'd better bust that jasper on the dome to make sure he don't come to."

Moran heard French's boots on the board flooring, and forced himself to lie still for a moment longer. French's shadow fell across him.

Then Moran moved. His right hand shot out and grabbed French by one ankle. He jerked savagely, and the hostler gave a frightened cry as his thin body arched backward and landed shoulders first in the middle of the boat. Moran twisted over and lunged under the guard-rail into the water, just as Wheeler's voice roared an oath and his gun boomed.

Moran went under. Holding his breath, he swam desperately down-stream until his lungs seemed ready to burst. Then his long body shot upward through the water and his head broke the surface.

The ferry was yards away. French stood in the middle of the boat, gun in hand. Wheeler was holding the oar in his left hand, his pistol in his right.

"Get him!" Wheeler roared.

They both fired at once, and the bullets geysered the water mere inches from Moran's shaggy head. Moran went under

(Continued on page 100)

don't Worry about Rupture

● Why put up with days . . . months . . . YEARS of discomfort, worry and fear? Learn now about this perfected invention for all forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire—you eagerly CRAVE to enjoy life's normal activities and pleasures once again. To work . . . to play . . . to live . . . to love . . . with the haunting Fear of Rupture banished from your thoughts! Literally *thousands* of rupture sufferers *have* entered this *Kingdom of Paradise Regained.* Why not you? Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where other trusses have failed is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless, *do not despair.* The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

Patented AIR-CUSHION Support Gives Nature a Chance to CLOSE the OPENING

Think of it! Here's a surprising yet simple-acting invention that permits Nature to close the opening—that holds the rupture securely but gently, day and night, at work and at play! Thousands of grateful letters express heartfelt thanks for results beyond the expectation of the writers. What is this invention—How does it work? Will it help me? Get the complete, fascinating facts on the Brooks Automatic Air Cushion Appliance—send now for *free* Rupture Book.

Cheap—Sanitary—Comfortable

Rich or poor—ANYONE can afford to buy this remarkable, LOW-PRICED rupture invention! But look out for imitations and counterfeits. The Genuine Brooks Air-Cushion Truss is never sold in stores or by agents. Your Brooks is made up, after your order is received, to fit your particular case. You buy direct at the low "maker-to-user" price. The perfected Brooks is sanitary, lightweight, inconspicuous. Has no hard pads to gouge painfully into the flesh, no stiff, punishing springs, no metal girdle to rust or corrode. It brings heavenly comfort and security—while the Automatic Air Cushion continually works, in its own, unique way, *to help Nature get results!* Learn what this patented invention can mean to you—send coupon quick!

PROOF!

Proof of the value and outstanding merit of the BROOKS APPLIANCE is clearly shown by the fact that over 9000 doctors have ordered it for themselves or their patients. One doctor alone has ordered for his patients over 400 Brooks Appliances. Follow your doctor's advice! If he says you have a reducible rupture and advises a proper-fitting support, don't subject yourself to further delay, which may prove dangerous, but send us your name and address immediately. Stop Your Rupture Worries! Enjoy the comfort, freedom of action and physical security which this made-to-order appliance will give you.

C. E. BROOKS, Inventor

SENT ON TRIAL!

No . . . don't order a Brooks now—FIRST get the complete revealing explanation of this world-famous rupture invention. THEN decide whether you want the comfort—the freedom from fear and worry—the security—the same amazing results thousands of men, women and children have reported. They found our invention the answer to their prayers! Why can't you? And you risk nothing as the complete appliance is SENT ON TRIAL. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate this no-risk trial. Send for the facts now—today—hurry! All correspondence strictly confidential.

Mail This Coupon NOW!

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
159-A State St., Marshall, Mich.

Without obligation, please send your FREE Book on Rupture, Proof of Results, and TRIAL OFFER—all in plain envelope.

*Name*_____

*Street*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____

State whether for Man ☐ *Woman* ☐ *or Child* ☐

FREE! Latest Rupture Book Explains All!

Sent You in Plain Envelope

Just Clip and Send Coupon ➡

Brooks Appliance Co., 159-A State St., Marshall, Mich.

Send NO MONEY

GLASSES BY MAIL

$2.95 UP COMPLETE

NEWEST STYLES
We GUARANTEE SATISFACTION or MONEY-BACK

16 DAYS' TRIAL

BROKEN GLASSES REPAIRED
FREE Catalog & Information. WRITE TODAY!
U. S. EYE-GLASSES CO., DEPT. C-57
1557 MILWAUKEE AVENUE CHICAGO, ILL.

FALSE TEETH

LOW AS $6.85

90 DAY'S TRIAL
TEST THEM
EXAMIME THEM

We make FALSE TEETH for you by mail from your own impressions. You have satisfaction of MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE. Customers in United States and Canada report satisfaction but you be your own judge.
SEND NO MONEY WRITE TODAY for FREE BOOKLET and MATERIAL
CLEVELAND DENTAL SUPPLY COMPANY
Dept. 48-T1, East St. Louis, Illinois

8 Mile Range - Wide Vision
BINOCULARS $4.75
15 DAYS FREE TRIAL
Post Paid or C. O. D.
Comes complete with case and straps. Well ground powerful lens. Easily focused for all distances and eye widths. Latest features. Ideal all-weather binoculars. Guaranteed. If not satisfied after 15 days trial, money refunded.
Vogue Binocular Co. 8420 S. Ashland Dept. 141 Chicago
"Attractive Proposition for Agents"

LOOK FOR THE WORDS
"ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS"
ON THE MAGAZINES YOU BUY!
Insure yourself full value in reading pleasure. . . .
Insist on a magazine which is plainly marked—
"ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS"

CASH IN ON SENSATIONAL NEW TAILORING LINE

Sensational news! Show friends complete line men's made-to-measure suits—at low prices—and pocket big CASH PROFITS on easy-payment-plan orders. Scores of rich quality woolens, tailored-to-measure: Newest styles. Guaranteed: YOUR OWN SUITS FREE as a Bonus! No money, no experience needed: We send complete money-making sample outfit FREE and amazing FREE BONUS SUIT offer.
Partial Payment Plan Pays BIG!
PIONEER TAILORING CO.
Dept. Z-1096 Chicago

EARN BIG MONEY EASY!

MAKE MORE MONEY
Taking Orders For The NIMROD Line

Earn more every day in the year representing old established firm with a complete line of fast selling necessities: Shirts, Ties, Underwear, Hosiery, Pajamas, Raincoats, Sweaters, Leather Jackets, Campus Coats, Pants, Belts, Breeches, Shoes, Uniforms, etc. Every item guaranteed. Experience unnecessary.
Write quick for FREE SALES EQUIPMENT
NIMROD COMPANY
4922-BM Lincoln Ave., Chicago, Ill.

ITCH
STOPPED QUICKLY
Use D.D.D. Prescription
Quick relief from itching of eczema, rashes and other externally caused skin troubles
35c bottle, at druggists, proves it or money back

(Continued from page 98)

and swam for a bend in the river. . . .

Around the bend, brush grew close to the water. Moran grabbed a gnarled bush and pulled himself up the steep bank. He shook himself like a wet dog, then took off his coat and hung it on a willow branch. He tipped his empty holster and let the water run out.

Making his way through the chaparral, he peered out toward the station. The rear of the stable was in sight, across an open stretch of ground. Moran shifted his hard eyes toward the ferry landing. The boat was just touching the farther shore, and what he saw there brought a muttered curse to his lips.

The four men who had made the attack on the stagecoach were boarding the ferry!

Moran had no illusions about what his fate would be if these human wolves caught him unarmed. He knew that breed of men; and he knew that his only hope was to reach the shelter of the station and arm himself before the ferry could set the road-agents across the stream.

He worked his way through the brush until he had the stable between himself and the ferry. Then he started across the open space at a run. Evidently the cook was somewhere around, and Moran half expected Baldy to open fire at any moment.

But no bullets drove at him, and he reached the rear door of the kitchen by skirting past the barn. The ferry had landed, and he would have to work fast. He peered cautiously into the kitchen. It was deserted. Straight across was the doorway leading into the dining room.

Beside this doorway stood Benton's shotgun. A revolver would have suited Moran better, but he was desperate enough to take what he could get. Wheeler, French and the outlaws must be close to the front door now. He wondered where the cook was, but he wasted no time

looking for him. Softly, on moccasined feet, he went across the kitchen and picked up the shotgun. He gave the percussion cap a glance, then leaned to peer into the mess room.

Baldy Benton, standing beside the table at which Moran had eaten breakfast, was holding in his hands the two papers which Moran had spread out for Wheeler's inspection. The cook had removed his dirty canvas apron, and now he wore a holstered pistol on his hip.

Wheeler, French and two of the road-agents filed in at the front door. Moran waited until they were all inside, then waited a little longer for the other two to show up. When they didn't put in an appearance, he slid sidewise into the doorway and leveled the shotgun.

"Get 'em up!" he snapped, keeping his voice low. "Quick!"

Wheeler stopped in his tracks, and his mustached lip lifted, exposing his teeth. He raised his hands. French and the two road-agents behind Wheeler thrust up their hands with a willingness that puzzled Moran. Benton turned to look at the shotgun. He, too, raised his hands.

"Where's the other two?" Moran said sharply. "Talk fast, you—"

A voice behind him answered, "We're here, buzzard-bait. Drop that gun!" A gun was jammed into Moran's back.

"We knew you'd be fool enough to come back," Finn Wheeler jeered. "That's why Ike and Hap come around the back way."

Moran, letting the shotgun slide from his hands, stepped forward into the mess room. Baldy Benton was backing away toward the side wall.

"Do you think this'll gain you anything, Wheeler?" Moran grated.

"Shore do," Wheeler said. "You won't get away this time."

"I'm fer stringin' him up to a rafter, right now," the man called Ike said. "Then we'll know he won't get away."

Okmulgee, Okla.
Hazelton, Pa.
Des Moines, Iowa
Sioux City, Iowa

Look Men!

Here's a Partial List of States, Cities and Institutions in which GRADUATES of I. A. S. were placed in positions as Finger Print Experts!

Be A Secret Service and Identification Expert!

State of Wash.
State of Michigan
State of Utah
State of Ohio
Duluth, Minn.
Detroit, Mich.
Pueblo, Colo.
Idaho Falls, Idaho
Ogden, Utah
Lorain Co., Ohio
St. Paul, Minn.
Pittsburgh, Pa.
Lincoln, Nebr.
Birmingham, Ala.
Columbus, Ohio
Havana, Cuba
New Haven, Conn.
Great Falls, Mont.
Galveston, Texas
Pensacola, Fla.
Stillwater, Okla.

Calgary, Alta., Can.
Houston, Texas
Waterloo, Iowa
Victoria, B. C.
Baton Rouge, La.
Atlantic City, N. J.
E. Lansing, Mich.
Globe, Arizona
London, Ont., Can.
Henryetta, Okla.
Seattle, Wash.
Ferndale, Mich.
McAlester, Okla.
Negaunee, Mich.
Lawton, Okla.
Crown Point, Ind.
Bay City, Mich.
Roanoke, Va.
Glendale, Calif.
Hawaiian Islands
Drumright, Okla.

Miami, Florida
Orlando, Florida
York, Pa.
El Paso, Texas
Everett, Wash.
Schenectady, N. Y.
Alhambra, Calif.
Livingston, Mont.
Saginaw, Mich.
Fort Collins, Colo.
Bedford, Ohio
Huntington, W. Va.
Salt Lake City, U.
Taft, California
Jamestown, N. Y.
Phoenixville, Pa.
Rochester, N. Y.
Media, Pa.
Dayton, Ohio
East Chicago, Ind.
Green Bay, Wis.
Nocona, Texas
Neenah, Wis.
Kingfisher, Okla.
Centralia, Wash.
Bismarck, N. D.
Bloomington, Ind.
Cuyahoga Falls, O.
Rock Island, Ill.
Philadelphia, Pa.
Astoria, Oregon
Pendleton, Ind.
St. Joseph, Mo.
State of Illinois
State of Iowa
State of Idaho
State of Colorado
Lima, Ohio
Selma, N. C.

Want a Regular Monthly Salary?

Investigate this opportunity to earn a regular monthly salary and share in Rewards. You will receive the same course as our hundreds of graduates who are *now* holding positions in the partial list of States, Cities and Institutions shown here. And one to fifteen I. A. S. Graduates are employed on regular monthly salaries by each bureau listed. Be a Finger Print and Secret Service Operator! Write for Free details how you can train at home in spare time to enter this young, swiftly-growing profession.

FREE *The Confidential Reports Operator No. 38 Made to his Chief!*

Write or send coupon for Free Reports and Illustrated Finger Print Book . . . the same information requested by *hundreds* of I. A. S. graduates now earning a monthly salary!

Institute of Applied Science, Dept. 7396
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen:—Without any obligation on my part whatever, send me the Reports of Operator No. 38, also your illustrated Free Book on Finger Prints and your low prices and Easy Terms Offer. Literature will be sent only to persons stating their age.

Name----------

Address---------- *Age*----------

WANTED

MEN and WOMEN

WORK for the U. S. GOVERNMENT

Salaries $1700 - $2600 Per Year

NO LAYOFFS! VACATIONS WITH PAY!
PENSIONS! REGULAR RAISES!

A LIFETIME JOB

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS
City Mail Carriers — Clerks—File Clerks
Post Office Clerks — Steno-Typists
Rura. Mail Carriers — Customs Inspectors
PATROL AND IMMIGRATION INSPECTORS

Pay for Course Only After You Are Appointed and Working

So sure are we that our simplified Interstate Home Study Course of coaching will result in your passing the Government examination and being appointed, that we are willing to accept your enrollment on the following basis. The price of our complete 10 week lesson course is $30, plus $3 Examiners' Fee.

We are willing to give you any course with the understanding that you are to pay for it ONLY AFTER YOU ARE APPOINTED AND WORKING FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

FULL Particulars FREE! GET READY IMMEDIATELY!

Clip and Mail this Coupon NOW

INTERSTATE HOME STUDY ACADEMY P.P.12
901 Broad St., Div. P.P.12, Newark, New Jersey

Please RUSH me FREE particulars, without obligation, how to qualify for a Government Job.

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

ASTHMA

Treatment mailed on FREE TRIAL. If satisfied, send $1; if not, it's Free. Write for treatment today.

W. K. STERLINE 610 Ohio Ave., Sidney, OHIO

Professional Model

SEND NO MONEY! — Save Money!

TRANSPARENT 60 Days' Trial! ROOFLESS PARTIAL

We make FALSE TEETH for you by MAIL from your own mouth-impression. Money-Back Guarantee of Satisfaction.

$7.95 to $35

FREE Free impression material, directions, catalog

U.S. Dental Co., Dept. C-87, Chicago, Ill.

IF I Send YOU THIS FINE SUIT—

Will You Wear It and Show It to Friends?

I need a reliable man in your town to wear a fine made-to-measure, all-wool DEMONSTRATING SUIT—advertise my famous Union clothing—and take orders. You can make up to $12.00 in a day. My line contains over 150 quality woolens, all sensational values, guaranteed.

CASH IN ON PARTIAL PAYMENT PLAN

You need no experience or money. I supply everything required FREE. Write me today for FREE details.

STONEFIELD, 1300 W. Harrison, Dept Z-796, Chicago

SINUS HEAD COLDS CATARRH

TRY THIS FOR RELIEF OF THE NASAL CONGESTION

To ease such nasal congestion symptoms as sniffling, sneezing, hawking, stuffed-up feeling, watery eyes, roaring ears and pounding pressure, FLUSH the nasal passage with SINASIPTEC. Based on a physician's successful prescription. SINASIPTEC washes out thick, crusty, sticky, old mucous as it soothes and reduces swollen, irritated tissue.

Send Today for An Amazing 25c Test

Just mail 25c with name, address today for new special complete *Sinasiptec* and *Nasal Douche* package for thorough trial to American Drug Corp., Dept. A13, 6060 Maple, St. Louis, Mo.

Wheeler shook his head. "No. We'll take him across the river."

The men had moved up into a compact group, with Moran in the center. Baldy Benton, off to one side, was forgotten. But now he attracted attention to himself.

"Hands up, all of you!" he said, his voice urgent and sharp. "Get 'em high!"

* * *

BENTON was standing beside a table, slightly crouched, with his revolver in his right hand.

"I'll shoot the first man that reaches for a gun," he said huskily. "You'd better get your hands up."

Slowly, the outlaws lifted their hands. Moran, puzzled, followed their example.

"What's this mean?" Wheeler roared.

Benton said, "Moran, get out of here."

Moran broke out of the circle, lifting Ike's gun as he went.

Baldy went on: "I found Moran's papers on the table where he'd been eatin', and then I knew Wheeler was fired and Moran was really supposed to take his place. I know that the other lubber that come here must of been tellin' the truth about it, too. I'm workin' for whoever's in charge here, and I ain't shippin' with pirates, if I know it."

Moran's heart leaped. Swinging up the borrowed gun, he backed around toward Baldy.

Finn Wheeler's voice was an angry roar; and suddenly the six men in the middle of the room went into action. Baldy's revolver crashed, and one of the bearded road-agents plunged down on his face, his gun half drawn. Ike, having no gun, was running toward the kitchen door.

Moran grasped the edge of a table, flung it over on its side, and crouched behind it. Bullets thudded into the heavy planks.

Ike reached the kitchen door, stooped and grabbed up the shotgun which Moran

had dropped. He wheeled back and flung the weapon to his shoulder. The shotgun roared, and Baldy Benton gave a sharp cry. The gun slipped from his hand, his knees buckled, and his thick body sagged to the floor.

Moran cursed savagely. He stuck his revolver muzzle past the edge of the table and dropped the hammer. Ike spun half around and lurched against the wall.

Bullets were thudding into the table top. Moran dropped to hands and knees, turned around and peered past the other edge of the table. He began shooting from this awkward position.

Cordite stung his nostrils, and the concussion of shots in the room was terrific. Moran's head was in a whirl. A bullet tugged at his buckskin sleeve and cut a bloody streak across his arm. He saw French sag and pitch forward. An instant later, the last of the road agents fell. Then the hammer of Moran's gun clicked on an empty chamber.

There were no more shots. Wheeler's bull voice was an incoherent roar. Moran saw the big man fling his pistol, heard it strike the top of the table behind which he was crouched. He saw his huge enemy lurch toward him, his bearded face twisted with rage.

A seething anger boiled in Moran's blood. He stood up and flung the table to one side. He doubled his fists and started forward. Then he saw Wheeler's eyes and stopped.

Wheeler's eyes were staring straight ahead with the blank look of a dead man; and he was not looking toward Moran. His shirt was red with blood, and he was bleeding from two or three wounds. His heavy voice still filled the room, but the sound grew hoarser and weaker with each beat of his heart. He lunged past Moran, so close that the boomer could have touched him, and went on. Moran did not even try to stop him.

ACCOUNTANTS!

Extend Your Experience Quickly; Grasp Today's Opportunities

Big advantages today for men who really know and can handle the accounts. Their services are vital to management in meeting the requirements of defense production. They are in line for higher jobs, higher pay. Prepare for these opportunities NOW! Step years ahead in experience at once. Display skill that wins recognition and can help YOU to a better position. Avail yourself of the practical guidance and counsel of the famous

ACCOUNTANTS' HANDBOOK

Here is help to apply right on the job. Edited by 70 leading experts, it offers 1,742 pages of specific advice for prompt handling of any situation, everyday or emergency. Covers whole range of accounting and related activities—not only principles, internal check, etc., but executive controls, analytical methods, use of reports, hundreds of forms.

FREE Nothing else like the Handbook. And to show you why, we've prepared a little book of 32 sample pages. It's FREE; just mail the coupon. The Sample-Section, together with full details, including low cost, of the Handbook, will be sent promptly.

Clip and mail this request form now

THE RONALD PRESS COMPANY, Dept. M-524
15 East 26th Street, New York, N. Y.
Send me, without charge, the 32-page Sample-Book with full information about the ACCOUNTANTS' HANDBOOK.

Name (please print).....
Occupation.....
Address.....
City..... State.....

INSURE YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY

For Only $1.00 A Month

ONE POLICY • ONE PREMIUM
Insures 2 to 10 Persons Ages from Birth to Age 70 in a Single Low Cost Policy

■ Yes, $1.00 a month is all you pay . . . there are no extras to pay on this amazing, low cost policy. Protects entire family, also grandparents and in-laws if desired. One death does not cancel this policy . . . members remaining after each death, continue insured as long as policy is kept up. Compare this policy with any . . . be convinced it is the very protection you want.

MAXIMUM CASH BENEFITS $3000.00

As is plainly stated in the policy, your entire family is insured for Cash Benefits for natural death; DOUBLE benefits for auto accidental death; TRIPLE benefits for travel accidental death. Benefits are divided by the number of persons insured.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS

We take your word for your state of health. No doctor will call. No agent will call. You deal direct. This economy makes our amazing low cost policy possible for you. Send no money. Simply permit us to send you our Ten-Day Free Trial Plan so that you may examine fully without obligating yourself in any way. Death strikes without warning. Tomorrow may be too late. Better mail this coupon right now.

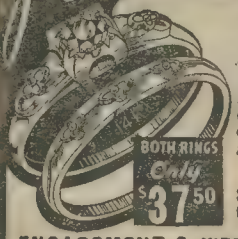
MAIL THIS COUPON FOR FREE TRIAL PLAN

Prudence Life Insurance Company P-12
407 South Dearborn Street, Chicago
Gentlemen: Please send me full information on the Prudence Family Group policy and your 10-Day Free Trial Plan. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name.....
Address.....
City..... *State*.....

Gifts FOR THOSE YOU LOVE

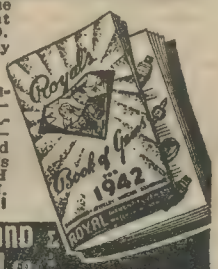
EASY PAYMENTS



Easy to give good gifts the Royal way! A small down payment—the balance in **TEN MONTHLY** payments. To open account just give age, occupation, etc. *(Dealings confidential).*

10 DAYS TRIAL
Satisfaction Guaranteed or Money Back.

ENGAGEMENT & WEDDING ENSEMBLE
CB-1 . . . New floral design Bridal "Duo." 14-K Yellow Gold, matched Engagement and Wedding Ring. Fine quality, genuine diamond in Engagement Ring. **Both only $37.50. $3.75 Down-$3.37 Monthly**



FREE CATALOG. Genuine Diamonds—Jewelry—Silverware. BULOVA, ELGIN, BENRUS watches—Cameras—Gifts. All offered at low cash prices on Royal's famous TEN MONTH EASY PAYMENT PLAN. Send for your copy TODAY!

ROYAL DIAMOND & WATCH CO.
Established 1895
Dept. 150Y 24 West 40th St. NEW YORK

RUPTURED Throw Away Your Truss!

FREE—*See this Amazing New Discovery*

Why suffer with rupture? You need never wear your truss again! You will be amazed at the wonderful successful results. See how this discovery works. FREE. Positively costs you nothing. No obligation. Just fill in and

——MAIL COUPON TODAY!——

PNEUMATIC INSTITUTE CO., 103 Park Ave., New York
Send me free under plain seal and wrapper "Amazing New Discovery." This places me under no obligation to buy.

Name.....

Address..... P4

High School Course at Home

Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H949, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

GLASSES as LOW as $1.95 PAIR

16 DAYS TRIAL

Choice of the LATEST STYLES—remarkably LOW PRICES. SATISFACTION GUARANTEED or your money back. If you are not satisfied—they will not cost you a cent.

SEND NO MONEY Write for FREE catalog today showing all of our many styles and LOW prices!

ADVANCE SPECTACLE CO. Dept. PP-11, Chicago

BROKEN GLASSES REPAIRED AT LOW COST!

NEW WESTERN MAGAZINE

Suddenly Wheeler's voice died, but his huge body lurched on. He ran straight into a table, buckled over it, rolled off, and lay still.

The up-country stagecoach jangled to a stop outside, but Moran did not hear it. He stepped over beside Wheeler. The big man lay on his back with one arm flung out, one knee drawn up. His eyes were open, staring sightlessly at the ceiling.

From where he lay on the floor the wounded Baldy said weakly, "That . . . took some guts."

"Yes," Moran said, "That . . . took guts . . ." Then he made a motion toward his bare head, as if to remove a hat. . . .

YOUR FRIENDS WILL WANT ONE TOO!

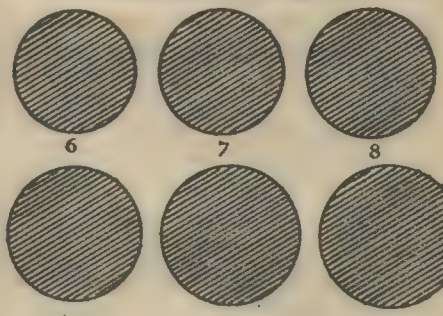
UNIQUE — HANDSOME — DIFFERENT

100% Sterling Silver

50c While They Last!

This massive sterling silver ring, with its raised signet replica of the American Longhorn Steer, can be bought *only* by the readers of a POPULAR PUBLICATIONS Magazine!

The circles below are for your convenience in determining your ring size



Clip This Coupon and Mail Today!

POPULAR PUBLICATIONS, INC.
205 East 42nd Street, N. Y. C.
I would like to own the sterling silver "Longhorn" ring, illustrated above, for which I enclose (50c) in coin, stamps or money order.

.....
(Signature)

.....
(Street Address) (City)

.....
(State) (Ring Size) O

(Continued from page 86)

ravine, then under some brushy mesquite and listened to Russell's crew crashing among the rocks, looking for him.

Wills kept saying over and over again, "We gotta get him! He knows too much!"

"He has theese five thousand dollars!" Sanchez complained.

They went past where Lew lay and he remained still, resting, realizing now why it had seemed as though he, not Tracy Russell, had been on trial. He knew why Mary Lassiter had been disappointed.

She and everybody else had heard the whisperings that Lew Barbour was a rustler. Despite all Wills could do, folks believed the Russell outfit to be rustlers. Wills' sly suggestions that Lew was a cheat simply linked Lew with them. When Lew cleared Tracy everybody thought he had lied. They thought he cleared Tracy because he was in with Russell.

Out among the rocks, Wills and the others were not giving up easily. They were systematically combing the area.

"He's hit. I saw him flop," Lew heard the sheriff say. "He's hit bad, but he might try to make it to town. We have to stop him from talking. There's still money to be made here; Lassiter still has cattle."

Lew thought about Pete Howell. Why had Tracy called Howell a crook. Why had Pete been on a spot?

"Maybe he's got headed for town," Wills said. "Mebby we better go there and head him off."

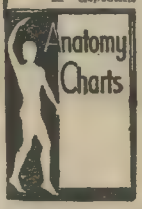
"Mebby he has," Ives ventured. "Then, again, mebby he ain't. The rest of you go in. I'll stay here. He don't have a gun. He's cold meat if I find him."

"Don't kill him till after he talks," Carr advised. "We want that money."

They left, then, and the hills became quiet. Peering from his place of concealment, Lew could see nothing. But he imagined Ives, lean, tall, his thin face

Learn this Profitable Profession ... in 90 Days at Home

Hundreds of men and women of all ages 18-50 make $10.00 to $20.00 in a single day giving scientific Swedish Massage and Hydro-Therapy treatments. There is a big demand from Hospitals, Sanitariums, Clubs, Doctors and private patients as well as opportunities for establishing your own office. Learn this interesting money-making profession in your own home by mail through our home study course. Same instructors as in our NATIONALLY KNOWN resident school. A diploma is awarded upon completion of the course. Course can be completed in 3 to 4 months. High School training is not necessary. Many earn big money while learning.



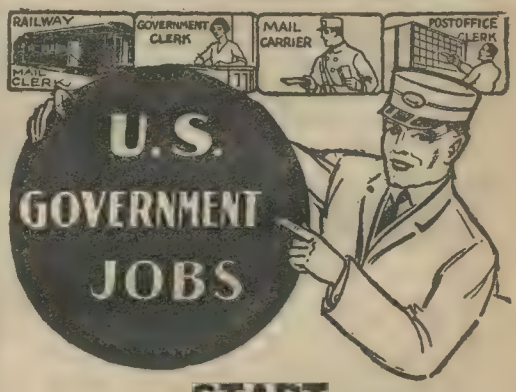
Anatomy Charts & Booklet FREE

Enroll now and we will include uniform coat, medical dictionary, patented reducing roller and Hydro-Therapy supplies without extra cost. The reducing course alone may be worth many times the modest tuition fee. Send coupon now for Anatomy Charts and booklet containing photographs and letters from successful graduates. These will all be sent postpaid—FREE.

THE College of Swedish Massage
(Successor to National College of Massage)
Dept. 995 —30 E. Adams St., Chicago.

You may send me FREE and postpaid Anatomy Charts, booklet containing photographs and letters from graduates, and complete details of your offer.

Name .....
Address .....
City ..... State .....



START
$1260 to $2100 YEAR
MEN — WOMEN

Prepare at once for 1942 Examinations.

32 Page Civil Service Book Free.

Mail Coupon Today— SURE

COUPON

Franklin Institute
Dept. D175
Rochester, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Rush to me FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government big pay jobs. Send me FREE 32-page book describing salaries, vacations, hours and work. Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.

Name .....
Address .....

TIGHTENS
FALSE TEETH
or No Cost!

JIM WONT EAT OUT BECAUSE HE LOSES HIS FALSE TEETH
BOB NEVER HAS PLATE TROUBLE
RUTH SAYS BOB NEVER HAS PLATE TROUBLE
I'LL ASK HIM FOR HIS SECRET
BOB, HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR PLATE FROM SLIPPING?
CINCH! A SQUEEZE OF CROWN RELINER KEEPS 'EM TIGHT!

AN AMAZING OFFER

Don't suffer embarrassment and discomfort caused by loose dental plates. Apply CROWN RELINER. In a jiffy your plate fits like new and stays that way up to 4 months. No old fashioned heating to burn your mouth. Just squeeze CROWN from tube and put your teeth back in. They'll fit as snugly as ever. Inventor is a recognized authority in dental field. A patent has been applied for CROWN RELINER to protect you from imitators. After you reline your plate with CROWN, take your false teeth out for cleaning without affecting the CROWN RELINER. CROWN RELINER is guaranteed . . . it's harmless, NOT A POWDER OR PASTE! If not satisfied, even after 4 months, return partly used tube for full refund.

J. Clements of Algonac writes: "My plates were so bad they rattled when I talked." "Now I can eat steaks or corn on the cob." Reline your plate with CROWN. It's tasteless. Has that natural pink color. Order a tube of CROWN RELINER today . . . enough to last a year. We include FREE a tube of CROWN plate cleaner. SEND NO MONEY. Just send name and address. Pay postman $1.00 for combination, plus postage, or send cash and we pay postage. Act at once and enjoy this new happiness.

CROWN PLASTIC CO. Dept. 1912
4358 W. Philadelphia Ave., Detroit, Mich

HAND COLORED In Oil
PHOTO ENLARGEMENT

Beautifully mounted in 7 x 9 white frame mat. Made from any photograph, snapshot or negative. Original returned. Send 25c and stamp—no other charges.

25c PLUS 3c STAMP for Mailing

COLORGRAPH, Dept. LM-19, 17 N. LeClaire, Chicago

CARD TRICKS

Amaze your friends . . . IDENTIFY regular UNMARKED Playing Cards from their backs. Get Sample Cards, one each, taken from Ten different popular decks—Bee, Bicycle, etc., showing circles around Key Marks, with complete instructions, $1.00.

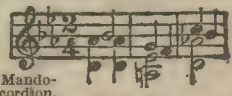
THE TELLURIUM CO.
Box 678-PF, WALLACE, IDAHO

WE MATCH PANTS
ToAnySuit!

Double the life of your coat and vest with correctly matched pants. 100,000 patterns. Every pair hand tailored to your measure. Our match sent FREE for your O. K. before pants are made. Fit guaranteed. Send piece of cloth or vest today.

SUPERIOR MATCH PANTS COMPANY
209 S. State St. Dept. 348. Chicago

LEARN



Piano, Violin, Cornet, Trumpet, Mandolin, Guitar, Banjo, Organ, Accordion, Saxophone, Clarinet. SIMPLIFIED HOME STUDY METHOD—conservatory grade. Successfully tried courses for beginners. ATTRACTIVELY PRICED—convenient payment plan. Free catalog. If juvenile, parent's signature must accompany inquiry.

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC
Dept. 154-N 1525 East 53rd St., Chicago, Ill.

crafty, waiting, waiting, waiting. . . .

Moving stealthily, Lew crawled out of the brush. He stood up, testing his legs. He was wabbly, but he could stand.

Ives wasn't around. There was nothing but rocks, brush, the vast distance off across the flats where a thin haze revealed Arapahoe town. But something told him Ives was near.

Lew was weak, had to brace himself against the rocks to rest, to keep from staggering. He stopped, that queer, uncomfortable feeling still with him that Ives' black eyes were watching him.

"It's crazy," he muttered. "If he was around I'd hear him. He's lit out."

"That's what you think!" a sarcastic voice said.

Lew didn't move. It was as though a ghost had answered his low voice. It made him creepy, made him feel queer.

Finally he turned his head. Ives was standing beside a rock. He didn't even bother to hold his gun in his hand. He was smiling.

Lew turned all the way around, so he could face Ives. He felt his booted foot turn on something under it. He didn't look down, because he was afraid Ives would follow the motion.

"It looks like you've got me," Lew said suddenly. "What kind of a proposition do I get if I tell you where the money is?"

Ives laughed. "Why should I make you any proposition?"

"Plenty of reasons," Lew argued. "I'm sunk. I know that. Wills can kill me and say I killed Carey. He can have Bartlett as a witness. Bartlett saw him chase me. Wills could make that stick. I'm as good as dead. I know that. Wills can't afford to let me talk. So I won't give up the money unless I get a break. Knowing I'll die anyway, why should I lay a lot of money in your hands?"

Ives' eyes still laughed. "Because you'd live a little longer," he said.

LEW shook his head. He moved his boot a fraction of an inch at a time, feeling the barrel of a gun, the roundness of a cylinder.

"That's not enough," Lew said. "I'll talk if you promise me a start out of the country. Wills can put a reward on me for killing Carey. That'll keep me away. You'll be safe, and I'll have my life. How's that?"

Ives said, and Lew knew he lied like hell when he spoke, "Sure. Sure you can have a start out of the country. Where's the money?"

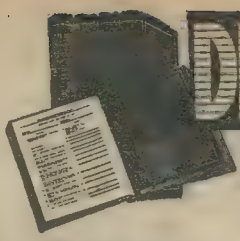
Lew's head was spinning. All of a sudden he was on his face, his fingers curling about the butt of the gun.

Ives let drive lead like a flash of lightning. Sand sprayed in Lew's face and eyes. The boom of the guns echoed back and forth across the hills. Lew wiped the sand out of his eyes and stared at Ives, who was lying on his back. Lew couldn't help but think that Ives wasn't laughing any more. Ives would never laugh again.

For a long time Lew lay there. Now that he was down, it was hard to get up. He wanted to lie there forever; to rest, to close his eyes and forget that he was supposed to be a rustler; that now he could never have Mary Lassiter; that Wills would spread the word that he had murdered Carey; that Tracy Russell, who had to offer him five thousand dollars, had taken it away and let these gents think that Lew Barbour had it. That was like a Russell.

Lew pushed himself up. He looked for Ives' horse, but couldn't find it and he knew quite suddenly that he didn't have much time to find it. He realized he had to get somewhere, quick.

Slowly and deliberately, saving his strength as much as possible, Barbour started to walk. He knew he was going to die, but he wanted to live long enough to face Wills and tell him in front of a hell



DRAFTING

BOOKS SENT FREE!

ON APPROVAL—5 VOLUMES
BRAND NEW EDITION

For Beginners or Experts

Written so you can understand every word, by well known engineers. De Luxe modernistic, washable cloth binding, over 1600 pages, hundreds of blueprints, charts and diagrams; prepares you for a good drafting job in mechanical lines. Sent for 10 days' free use if you mail coupon immediately.

Only 15 minutes a day with these WONDER BOOKS can prepare you for a good drafting job. Drafting from simple straight lines to important complex plans. A step at a time! Built especially for beginners, for men with only grammar schooling. Drafting room practice, PLUS ENGINEERING, made easy and clear. 400 pages on tool design, over 300 pages on machine design. Includes special volume on blueprint reading with *full size* actual production blueprints, some 20"x30", as well as question and answer sheets.

Big Field • Big Demand • Big Pay

Competent draftsmen are urgently needed in all manufacturing lines at $30.00 to $75.00 a week. That's just the beginning—FOR DRAFTSMEN HAVE GOOD CHANCES FOR ADVANCEMENT. Pleasant, fascinating work, easy to learn and do. Learn quickly with these books—send coupon for a set and see for yourself.

A year's consulting service now given to all buyers of this famous cyclopedia of drafting.

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY
Publishers—Home Study Courses

American Technical Society, Dept. D931, Drexel at 58th St., Chicago, Ill.
Send for 10 days' trial, Brand New 5 volume set of "Drafting for Machine Trades." I will pay the delivery charges only. If I wish, I may return books in 10 days and owe you nothing, but if I decide to keep them, I will send $2.00 after 10 days, then only $2.00 a month until $19.80, the total price, is paid. Send Brand New edition and include Consulting Service Certificate.

Name.....

Address.....
Please attach letter stating age, occupation, employer's name and address and that of at least one business man as a reference.

One Policy-One Premium-One Low Cost
INSURES YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY

Only $1 a month is all you pay for this low cost Triple Cash Benefit Life Insurance Policy with cash benefits up to $3,000.00 for the entire family. The Jess Bradley family of Paw Paw, Michigan, pictured at the left is covered by this one Big policy.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION—Each and every member of your family from baby to grandparents may be insured without medical examination for any one. We take your word regarding their good health. Act today—tomorrow may be too late.

MAXIMUM Cash Benefits $3,000.00

The generous provisions of the "American Family" policy pays for natural death, double benefits for accidental automobile death, and triple benefits for travel accidental death. Only $1 a month is all you ever pay for all this insurance for your entire family.

SEND NO MONEY

We want to send you our "American Family" Life Insurance Policy on our 10-Day Free Inspection Offer. You decide for yourself.

10 DAYS FREE OFFER

You are under no obligation to keep it. No agents will call on you and you have 10 full days to decide. Send coupon now.

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY

Interstate Reserve Life Insurance Co.
10 East Pearson St., Dept. 49-A
Chicago, Ill.

NO AGENT WILL CALL

Please send me without obligation 10-day free examination offer and full details of "American Family" Group Life Policy. Send No Money.

Name.....

Address.....

SAVE ON TIRES
BUY NOW
Before Rubber Goes Higher
GOODYEAR-FIRESTONE
GOODRICH-FISK-U.S.
And Other Standard Makes
$2.25
DEALERS WANTED!
National Defense calls for rubber conservation! Crude rubber prices are up! Tires are getting scarcer daily. Our Standard Brand reconditioned tires, serviceably repaired by experts with high-grade materials, will solve the tire problem for you. Only our 26 years' experience and volume sales make these low prices possible. Take advantage of them today. Don't delay. ORDER NOW.

BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21	$2.25	$1.05
28x4.50-20	2.35	1.05
30x4.50-21	2.40	1.15
29x4.75-19	2.45	1.25
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-16	2.75	1.45
6.00-17	2.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75

UNCONDITIONAL GUARANTEE
Our Guarantee Bond agrees to replace at half price tires failing for any reason whatsoever, to give full 9 months' service. Replacements f. o. b. Chicago.

TRUCK BALLOONS

Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$4.25	$1.65
6.50-20	4.45	1.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95
7.50-20	6.95	3.75
8.25-20	9.95	5.65
9.00-20	10.95	5.95

ORDER TODAY

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x5	$4.25	$1.95
32x6	7.95	2.95
34x7	10.95	4.65
38x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x8	13.25	4.95

ALL OTHER SIZES

SEND ONLY $1.00 DEPOSIT on each tire ordered. ($3.00 on each Truck Tire.) We ship balance C. O. D. Deduct 5 per cent if cash is sent in full with order. To fill order promptly we may substitute brands if necessary. ALL TUBES BRAND NEW—GUARANTEED—
PERRY-FIELD TIRE & RUBBER CO.
1720 S. Michigan Ave., Dept. 5071-A, Chicago

SPECIAL WORK FOR MARRIED WOMEN
Earn up to $23 in a week and your own dresses Free. No canvassing, no investment. Write fully giving age, dress size.
FASHION FROCKS, INC., Dept. 2613I, CINCINNATI, OHIO

DRAFTING
MORE DRAFTSMEN NEEDED in all manufacturing and building lines—$30 to $50 a week and UP. Learn *quickly* at home in spare time. *Selective Employment Service.* Write NOW for FREE Bulletin. No obligation.
American School
Dept. DD949, Drexel & 58th, Chicago

RUPTURED?
Get Relief This Proven Way
Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured" and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write:
CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 15, Bloomfield, New Jersey

FREE SAMPLES OF REMARKABLE TREATMENT FOR
Stomach Pains
DUE TO GASTRIC HYPERACIDITY
H. H. Bromley, of Shelbourne, Vt., writes: "I suffered for years with acid stomach trouble. My doctors told me I had acid stomach ulcers and would have to diet the rest of my life. Before taking your treatment I had lost a lot of weight and could eat nothing but soft foods and milk. After taking Von's Tablets I felt perfectly well, ate almost anything and gained back the weight I had lost." If you suffer from indigestion, gastritis, heartburn, bloating or any other stomach trouble due to gastric hyper-acidity, you too, should try Von's for prompt relief. Send for FREE Samples of this remarkable treatment and details of trial offer with money back guarantee. Instructive Booklet is included. Write:
PHILADELPHIA VON CO., Dept. 136-J
Fox Building, Philadelphia, Pa.

of a lot of people just what kind of a skunk he was.

Suddenly there was a horse tied to a brush in front of Lew. Ives horse! He laughed as he stood there, staring at it. Luck! It was playing into his hands. Nothing could whip him now. Nothing could stop him from killing Wills, Carr, Mario Sanchez. . . .

Painfully he crawled into the saddle and rode on. The sun sank low; shadows reached out from the base of the hills, seeming to race against the slow time that Lew Barbour made.

Then it was dusk, and the low, squat buildings of Arapahoe were black, shapeless and ugly in his eyes. He rode into the end of the street. As he entered the town he watched the street clear suddenly, as though a wintry wind had blown down its length, making it barren, making cold hard room for men to die. . . . Lew knew then that Wills had talked. Seeing him, folks hurried inside. He was a killer, a murderer, wanted by the law. . . .

CHAPTER FIVE

Confession in Gunsmoke

LEW dismounted and got out his gun. Somebody called, "Lew Barbour is in town!" The call resounded up and down the street: "Lew Barbour's in town! *Lew Barbour!*"

Lew started up the street. He still had to walk very slowly. He saw Lassiter's buckboard in front of the General Store; watched Mary come onto the porch with her father, then draw back as Lassiter put out a hand and guided her back to the door. He saw Wills hurrying out of the sheriff's office; saw the saloon doors slap open violently and Carr, Hooper and Mario Sanchez literally come tumbling out.

Lew kept on walking. The closer he

could get the better. He knew he had to make it fast—had to be close not to miss. He hoped they'd give him a chance to talk by waiting till he got close. But as soon as they sighted him he knew they weren't going to give him any chance at all. . . .

Sanchez edged along a building wall; Carr stepped out away from him, into the street. Hooper went farther out. Wills was across the street in the shadows. They were playing safe, advancing as slowly as Lew himself. As soon as he'd start to talk they'd begin firing. They'd keep his mouth shut. Maybe one of them would get hit, but no more than one before Lew Barbour went down in the dust, a killer killed. . . .

Lew heard a woman sobbing somewhere and wondered if it was Mary. He couldn't see her now, because he couldn't take his eyes from those black figures. But he hoped it wasn't her. He didn't want her to cry. He only wanted her to know he was square.

As he shuffled along, Lew called out suddenly, "Wills I can prove you're a dirty—"

As soon as he started to talk they began firing. Wills, anxious, fearful for his good name, shot first, his gun thundering sound that drowned Lew's voice. Wills was in a hurry. He missed. But Carr didn't miss. Carr's bullet knocked a leg out from under Lew. He tried to get up, but couldn't. So he knelt there, facing their fan-like formation.

The racket was harsh and dry sounding, like the ugly cackle of the Angel of Death. Hooper, his lanky form black against the yellow of a dirty 'dobe wall, suddenly crumpled to earth. Lew Barbour frowned, hesitated. Hooper had gone down when Lew hadn't been shooting at him!

"It's Tracy Russell!" Carr yelled suddenly.

He tried to shoot someone to one side of Lew, but a gun blasted and a man laughed and Carr spun about as though a giant

FOR A BETTER JOB AND BIGGER PAY

Learn BLUEPRINT READING

Amazing Invention Makes Blueprint Reading as Easy as Seeing a Movie

NOW, at last an Amazing New Invention has been perfected by Prominent Experts *exclusively* for Austin Technical Institute—an invention that makes Blueprint Reading easy as A.B.C. Better Jobs and Bigger Pay are now waiting for men who can read Blueprints. If you can read English, YOU, too, can learn to read Blueprints EASILY, QUICKLY—RIGHT AT HOME—IN SPARE TIME at an amazingly low cost—through this Shortcut, Inexpensive Sensational New "Shadowgraph" Method. Thousands of men who can read Blueprints are wanted at once in every defense industry. Write today for our FREE Illustrated Book and full details—DON'T DELAY.

SEND THIS COUPON FOR YOUR FREE BOOK

AUSTIN TECHNICAL INSTITUTE Div. P
899 Broad Street, Div. P., Newark, N. J.
Send me FREE, without obligation, your Illustrated Book, "Step Up to a Better Job and Bigger Pay," also full details.

Name .....
Address .....
City ..... State.....

SICKNESS OR ACCIDENT

Every hour, day and night, 4,080 people are disabled through sickness and accident. You never know when tragedy strikes. The Policy of the Century comes to your aid at the time of your most dire need—when you are down, financially handicapped, unable to care for loved ones.

THE POLICY OF THE CENTURY

WILL HELP PAY YOUR BILLS

The United Insurance Company of Chicago, a legal reserve insurance company which has paid millions of dollars to policyholders, offers you the new "CENTURY" Policy. This company is not an association or assessment company. Old, reliable. It is approved by state insurance departments. Be safe! Costs only $1 per month. Just mail coupon.

INSURES MEN AND WOMEN

The new "Century" Sickness and Accident Policy insures both men and women with the benefits shown here, plus many other liberal features outlined in the policy.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION

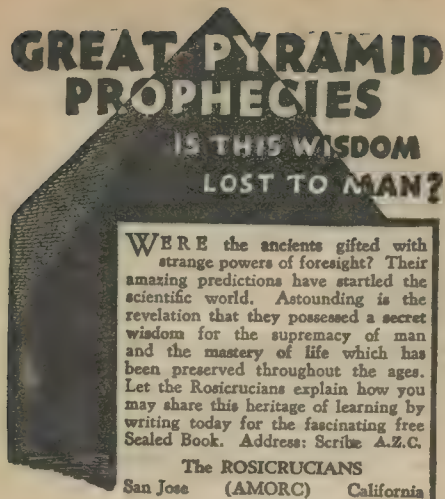
Anyone between 16 and 75 can apply. We take your word. No agent or collector will call.

SEND NO MONEY Remember you do not send one cent—just mail the coupon below. Don't delay—do this today!

MAIL COUPON NOW FOR DETAILS

UNITED INSURANCE COMPANY NO AGENT
ELGIN TOWER, Suite U-40-G WILL CALL
ELGIN, ILLINOIS
Please mail me at once complete information and how to get the "Century" Policy for my Free Inspection without obligation.

Name.....
Address.....



WERE the ancients gifted with strange powers of foresight? Their amazing predictions have startled the scientific world. Astounding is the revelation that they possessed a secret wisdom for the supremacy of man and the mastery of life which has been preserved throughout the ages. Let the Rosicrucians explain how you may share this heritage of learning by writing today for the fascinating free Sealed Book. Address: Scribe A.Z.C.

The ROSICRUCIANS
San Jose (AMORC) California
NOT a religious organization

NEW ZIPPER SHOE

Sensation in shoes! "Clipper" ZIPS on and off instantly. Now's the time to build yourself a highly profitable shoe business with Clipper and 249 other sensational shoe styles for men and women. Dress-work-sports shoes. Prices low as $2.98. Extremely liberal profit for you. Complete sales outfit absolutely free. Write now.

MASON SHOE MFG. CO.
Dept. A-1094, Chippewa Falls, Wis.

Learn to MOUNT BIRDS

Tan SKINS, make up FURS

Be a Taxidermist. *Double your hunting fun.* We teach you at Home. Mount Birds, Animals, Fish, Heads, common specimens. Fun and profits. Decorate home and den MAKE MONEY. Mount game, tan for others. Big profits in spare time. WRITE TODAY. 100 game pictures in FREE BOOK. Hunters, get your copy. It's Now Free. Send post card. State your AGE.

FREE BOOK

NORTHWESTERN SCHOOL OF TAXIDERMY
Dept. 3369 Omaha, Nebraska

SONG POEM WRITERS:

Send us your original poem. Mother, Home, Love, Sacred, Patriotic, Comic or any subject, for our plan and FREE Rhyming Dictionary at once.
RICHARD BROS., 30-A Woods Building, Chicago, Illinois.

FREE CROSS CLASP PIN

Just Send Us Your Name and Address
We will mail you this beautiful GENUINE 14 KARAT GOLD FINISH CROSS with CLASP PIN attached ABSOLUTELY FREE. Also FREE CATALOG showing over 100 VALUABLE GIFTS —GIVEN FREE—with FULL INFORMATION on HOW TO RECEIVE THEM. Enclose stamp or coin for mailing FREE CROSS.
THE RELIGIOUS HOUSE, DEPT. POP
333 S. MARKET ST., CHICAGO, ILL.

AGENTS SELL NYLON HOSE 1/2 PRICE IN Combination Order

Wear Hose We Furnish With Large Outfit
Women almost crazy over Nylon Hosiery and this sensational half price combination offer, with guaranteed silk hose. Read these exceptional first week earnings. E. L. Andrews, Iowa, $35.97; Stella Scott, Okla., $36.74; W. C. Stock, Pa., $36.25. Guaranteed by Good Housekeeping as advertised therein. Rush name and address on penny postal.

EXTRA HOSE FOR YOUR PERSONAL USE SENT WITH LARGE OUTFIT

WILKNIT HOSIERY COMPANY
Midway 15-B12, Greenfield, Ohio

had yanked at his shoulder. He kept on spinning and didn't go down; he fired again as he faced in Lew's direction. But the answer to that shot sent him backward, and flat on his back.

Mario Sanchez was trying to get away, shooting back from a stooped, crab-like position. Wills was still, stopped by the surprise of Tracy Russell, ragged, bloody, a lean, wild-eyed youngster who showed his big white teeth as he laughed there in the shadows at the side of the street.

Sanchez fell on his face, making a smaller target, his colt flaming at Tracy. Lew Barbour pushed himself up, staggered toward Wills. Wills' pistol was lashing flame at him, but Lew laughed.

"You're whipped, Wills," he called. "You're done!"

As he shuffled past Carr, where Carr lay on the ground, the man moved. His hand came up slowly. "I'll kill you, anyway!" Carr croaked.

His slug whizzed past Lew's cheek. Carr flopped down into the dirt again. This time he wouldn't move again, ever.

Tracy Russell was half way across the street now, moving toward Sanchez. The Mexican was still firing. So was Wills. Lew could tell he was being hit because he shuddered, shivered as though he was cold every time Wills' gun flamed. He seemed to stay on his feet simply because he willed it.

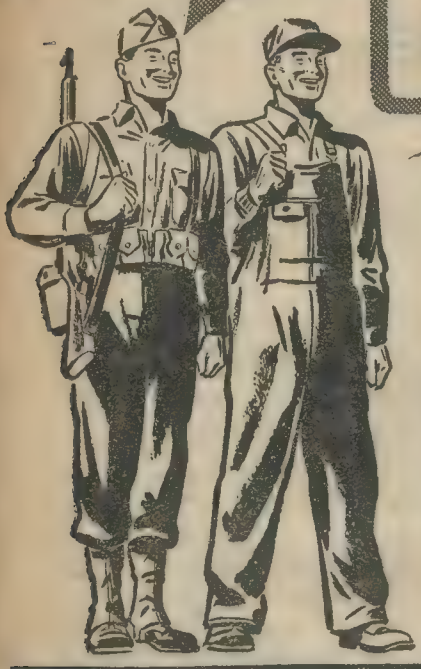
* * *

SANCHEZ screamed and leaped to his feet. He ran toward a building corner. Russell stopped, sweeping his gun up, holding it out straight so he could aim deliberately at Sanchez's back. The crack of the Colt was the only sound, for even Wills stopped to watch Sanchez die; Sanchez, who fell on his face and slid forward in the dust.

(Continued on page 112)

Together we'll make the U. S. invincible

Because we're both getting MODERN TRAINING!



YES, America is building *two* great modern armies: an army of trained soldiers, and an army of trained workers!

You belong in one of them! Today, the man who neglects his training neglects not only his own welfare—but his country's! Start now to modernize your training—make yourself a more valuable citizen, eligible for the bigger, better paying jobs in business and industry!

An I. C. S. Course in your line of work costs only a few dollars monthly. Study at home, in your spare time. Day by day, you'll find yourself better prepared for *real success* in your field. Mail coupon immediately, for full details on courses and costs.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF SERVICE TO AMBITIOUS AMERICANS

1891★1941

BOX 3276-J, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Agriculture
- ☐ Air Brake
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Airplane Drafting
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Auto Engine Tune-up
- ☐ Auto Technician
- ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Aviation Mechanic
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Bridge Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Concrete Engineering
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Heating
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ House Planning
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Machinist
- ☐ Management of Inventions
- ☐ Mfg. of Pulp and Paper
- ☐ Marine Engines
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mine Foreman
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Patternmaking
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Poultry Farming
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Public Works Engineering
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ R. R. Section Foreman
- ☐ R. R. Signalman
- ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Sheet Metal Work
- ☐ Ship Drafting
- ☐ Shop Practice
- ☐ Steam Electric
- ☐ Steam Engines
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Welding, Electric and Gas
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

BUSINESS COURSES

- ☐ Accounting
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ C. P. Accounting
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ French
- ☐ Good English
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Illustrating
- ☐ Managing Men at Work
- ☐ Railway Postal Clerk
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Showcard and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Traffic Management

HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

- ☐ Advanced Dressmaking
- ☐ Foods and Cookery
- ☐ Home Dressmaking
- ☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing
- ☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England

TRAIN FOR Radio in 8 WEEKS
I WILL FINANCE YOUR TRAINING

Prepare for opportunities in Radio by 8 weeks of practical shop work in the great Coyne Radio Shops, on real RADIO equipment. You don't need advanced education or experience. Free Employment Service for life. Many earn while learning. Mail coupon today for free book which tells you how hundreds have become successful Radio Men after taking our training.

H. C. LEWIS, Pres., RADIO DIV., Coyne Electrical School
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 91-5H, Chicago, Illinois

Send Free Radio Book and facts. Tell me about your "Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY STATE

For BOYS AT CAMP!
FOR CHRISTMAS GIFTS!

ORDER TODAY!

Attractive 6-Piece Men's Travel Set with Hand Lettered Gilt Initials $1

Dandy for yourself, for gifts. Comb, razor box, lotion bottle, tooth brush box, mirror, case. SEND NO MONEY! Send order on postcard. Print initials desired. Sets will be sent Parcel Post collect, while supply lasts. Pay postman just $1 plus postage.

GIFT SALES CO.
409 State Trust Bldg., Moline, Ill.

BECOME A DETECTIVE!
Thrilling, fascinating; work at home or travel. Opportunity to earn while learning. Free Detective particulars. Raymond Stults, Bristol, Indiana.

THERE IS NO EMERGENCY
for those who have a true and stable philosophy of life. An invulnerable defense originates in a mind impervious to error. Are you invulnerable? If not, are you doing anything to achieve invincibility? Read LEMURIA THE INCOMPARABLE. 60 pages of evidence supporting the existence of a New Race and Order. TWO DIMES cover the mailing cost. No obligation. Send request today to Dept. 55.
925 N. PLANKINTON AVE. LEMURIAN FELLOWSHIP MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

SUCCESS OPPORTUNITIES! FREE
Do You Want to Get Ahead?
NOW is the time to get a better job, better pay, knowledge and culture that spell happiness, success. See big 1942 illustrated catalog of authoritative, simplified books on aviation, accounting, engineering, English, drafting, radio, history, typewriting, machine shop work, Spanish, secretarial practice, and a hundred other subjects. Many slightly used, as low as 49c, postpaid. Money back if not satisfied. Write for FREE catalog NOW.
CATALOG HOME STUDY BOOKS Save ½
HOME STUDY BOOK CO.
Dept. 1112, 1251 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.

$7.95 60 DAYS TRIAL

FALSE TEETH
AS LOW AS $7.95
Per Plate. Dental plates are made in our own laboratory from your personal impression. WORKMANSHIP and Material GUARANTEED or PURCHASE PRICE REFUNDED. We take this risk on our 60-Day Trial Offer.
DO NOT SEND ANY MONEY Mail post card for FREE material and catalog of our LOW PRICES.
DON'T PUT IT OFF — Write us today!
BRIGHTON-THOMAS DENTAL LABORATORY
DEPT. 893 6217 S. HALSTED STREET, CHICAGO, ILL.

NEW WESTERN MAGAZINE

(Continued from page 110)

Then Tracy turned and grinned recklessly at Wills. Wills was petrified. It seemed as though he couldn't move as Russell slowly raised his gun. A woman screamed. Lassiter, gun in hand, leaped off the porch.

"Russell!" he yelled. "Stop it! Damn you!"

Russell didn't turn. Suddenly Wills shook himself free from his paralysis. He screamed and tried to leap sidewise. Tracy's gun boomed and Wills shivered and swayed, and all of a sudden slumped down into the dirt.

Lassiter slid to a halt. Russell looked at him and with a contemptuous gesture tossed his gun away. "Come on, Lassiter," he said. "I have no fight with you." Then he slumped down to the street.

Barbour tried to take a step, but his feet wouldn't track now. He was played out. He fell on his face and a crowd gathered about, voices high and resentful. He heard somebody say something about hanging Barbour. Then he heard Lassiter's voice. He opened his eyes and saw Lassiter kneeling beside him. Lassiter had a bundle of money in his hands.

"Tracy talked a lot," he said. "He told about Wills being in with them, about their putting suspicion on you for rustling. He said he tried to give you some money to get you out of a hole, but you wouldn't take it. So he stole your cattle so he'd have something to pay you for. Here it is. He wanted me to give it to you. I told him I would. He said Pete Howell was crooked, too. Pete was working for the Russells. Tracy and Pete had a fight over Pete's split of the crooked money. Pete wanted more than he was getting."

Lew took the bundle of money from Lassiter. Turning his head to look over to where Tracy Russell lay, a huddled heap in the dust, he thought of Tracy

(Concluded on page 114)

PRICE SMASHING SALE!

Genuine-Late UNDERWOOD NOISELESS

Now $37.85 CASH

MFRS. ORIG. SELLING PRICE $125.00

OR

EASY TERMS While THEY Last!

NO MONEY DOWN

10 DAY TRIAL

Truly an outstanding offer! Only because of an exceptional purchase can I sell these rebuilt Noiseless machines at the sensationally low price of $37.85 cash, or for only 70c a week on my easy term price. Each one carefully rebuilt so it looks like a new machine costing three times as much. *The mfrs. orig. selling price on this Underwood was $125.00.* It's sent to you in Underwood packing box with Underwood book of instructions on care and operation.

A NOISELESS MACHINE

Latest achievement in typewriters! Provides writing perfection with SILENCE. For those who want the advantages of a quiet home or office. *This Underwood eliminates the nerve shattering clatter common to many models.* An aid to better work because it allows clear thinking, reduces fatigue, improves accuracy. This typewriter disturbs no one, for it is almost impossible to hear it operate a few feet away. You get all the features of an Underwood **PLUS Noiseless typing.**

FIRST CHOICE of TYPISTS

Over 5,000,000 Underwoods now in use! Recognized as the finest, strongest built! Here is an office size Underwood with late modern features that give you **SILENT TYPING.** Has all standard equipment—keyboard, 2 colors, back spacer, automatic reverse, tabulator, etc. **There is no risk! See before you buy on my 10 Day No Obligation Trial Plan.** Return machine if not satisfied.

WIDE 14" CARRIAGES

Wide carriage machines for government reports, large office forms, billing, etc., only $3.00 extra with order. Takes paper 14" wide, has 12" writing line. **A Real Buy in a rebuilt Underwood Noiseless!** (See coupon).

International Typewriter Exchange
231 W. Monroe St. Dept. 1239, Chicago, Ill.

EXTRA VALUE!

TYPEWRITER STAND

For those who have no typewriter stand or handy place to use a machine, I make this special offer. This attractive stand that ordinarily sells for $4.85 can be yours for only $3.00 extra—payable 25c a month. *Quality built. Note all its convenient features.* (See coupon).

Easy Terms—10c a Day

No obligation. See before you buy on wide open 10 day trial. Pay no money until you test, inspect, compare, and use this Underwood Noiseless. *You judge for yourself.* When you are convinced that this is the biggest typewriter bargain you have ever seen then say, "I'll buy." Send only 70c a week or $3.00 a month until term price of only $41.85 is paid. **There is no red tape or investigation—My offer is exactly as I state it.**

2-YEAR GUARANTEE

I back this machine with my personal 2-yr. guarantee that it is in A-1 condition and will give first class service. Over 30 years of Fair Dealing backs this guarantee.

FREE! TOUCH TYPING COURSE

Complete Van Sant home study course free with Underwood. It's carefully illustrated, written expressly for home use.

MAIL COUPON NOW - Limited Quantities on Sale!

International Typewriter Exchange Dept. 1239
231 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill.
Send Underwood Noiseless (F.O.B. Chicago) for ten days' trial. If I keep it, I will pay $3.00 per month until easy term price ($41.85) is paid. If not satisfied I can return it express collect.
☐ 10" carriage ☐ 14" carriage ($3.00 extra)
Name.....Age.....
Typewriten signatures not acceptable.
Address.....
City.....State.....
CAUTION—For quick shipment give occupation and reference.

☐ Check for typewriter stand ($3.00 extra—payable 25c a month.) Stand sent on receipt of first payment on Underwood.

Classified Advertising

Detectives

DETECTIVES—Experience unnecessary. Secret Investigations. Write, Wagner, 2640-R Broadway, N. Y.

Educational

Correspondence courses and educational books, slightly used. Sold. Rented. Exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Complete details and bargain catalog FREE. Write NELSON COMPANY, 500 Sherman, Dept. M-218, Chicago.

MAKE MONEY spare or full time or traveling. Analyze handwriting. Placement service. Fascinating lesson free. 705 Foundation, Noel, Missouri.

For Inventors

INVENTORS:—HAVE YOU a sound, practical invention for sale, patented or unpatented? If so, write Chartered Institute of American Inventors, Dept. 31, Washington, D. C.

Inventions Wanted

CASH FOR INVENTIONS, patented, unpatented. Mr. Ball, H-9441 Pleasant, Chicago.

Movie Stars

YOUR FAVORITE Movie Star's autographed picture —$1.00. Box 386, Hollywood.

Nurses Training Schools

MAKE UP TO $25 — $35 WEEK as a trained practical nurse! Learn quickly at home. Booklet Free. Chicago School of Nursing, Dept. D-11, Chicago.

Patent Attorneys

INVENTORS—Protect your idea with a Patent. Don't delay. Secure "Patent Guide"—Free. Preliminary information furnished without obligation. Write CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN, Registered Patent Attorney, 1M26 Adams Building, Washington, D. C.

Personal

OLD DENTAL PLATES remade with transparent lifelike plastic. Free booklet. BEAUTI-PINK CO., Dept. 19, Union City, N. J.

Photo Finishing

ROLLS DEVELOPED — 25c coin. Two 5 x 7 Double Weight Professional Enlargements, 8 Gloss Deckle Edge Prints. CLUB PHOTO SERVICE, Dept. 16, La Crosse, Wis.

Poems—Songwriters

WANTED — Poems for musical setting. Submit for consideration. Phonograph transcriptions made. Rhyming Pamphlet FREE. Keenan's Studio, PP, Box 2140, Bridgeport, Conn.

SONGS—SONG POEMS WANTED. No charge for melodies. Free examination. Hollywood Recording Studios, 87D10 Preuss Sta., Los Angeles.

POEMS WANTED!—for musical setting. Submit for free examination. Recordings made. VANDERBILT STUDIOS, Box 112-J, Coney Island, New York.

SONG POEMS WANTED. Free examination. Send poems. McNeil, Master of Music, 510-A South Alexandria, Los Angeles, Calif.

SONGWRITERS: Send poem for our plan and FREE Rhyming Dictionary. RICHARD BROTHERS, 30 Woods Building, Chicago.

Songwriters, Interesting Proposition. Write PARAMOUNT SONG-RECORDING STUDIO, L-64, Box 190, Hollywood, Calif.

SONGWRITERS—Write for free booklet. Profit Sharing Plan. Allied Songs, 7608 Reading, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Tattooing Supplies

START profitable Tattooing and Removing Business. Free instructions, Write TATTOO, 651 South State, Chicago.

Used Clothing for Sale

WOOL OVERCOATS PRACTICALLY NEW $4.00 — Send only 50c—Balance C.O.D. FREE CATALOG Men's Clothing Bargains. Acme, 164PP Henry St., New York City.

(Concluded from page 112)

telling him, "You saved my neck from a damn good stretchin'. I'll remember that, mister."

Tracy *had* remembered. When he couldn't get Lew to take money one way, he figured out another way to do it.

"What Tracy told me makes things a lot different than they were," Lassiter said. "It's time folks changed their opinion of you, and Tracy saw to it that they're doin' it. I hope you're willing to start over again. I'll start off by admitting I took Pete's gun after Tracy killed him. I did it because I was crazy to get something on a Russell."

Barbour frowned. As he watched the play of emotions on Lassiter's big-boned face he was conscious of the money in his lap. Five thousand. His money. Pay for his cattle, and now he had every right to it. It was enough to pay Bartlett and stock his range anew.

"Sure, I'm willing to start over," he said. "What do you think I've been fighting for?"

Then he caught a glimpse of Mary coming down the street, slowly, hesitantly, as though fearful of what she would find. Lew pushed himself up and took hold of Lassiter to steady himself. He reckoned a gent, down on the rear end of his britches, wouldn't make a very nice picture for the girl he was going to marry.

He said, before Mary arrived, "About that gun . . . I don't see where it'll do anybody any good to know who took it. Just as long as they know he had one. Tracy was acquitted, and Pete is dead. I don't think anybody is curious. If they are, my memory's plumb bad. . . . Nobody ever said anything to me about it. . . ."

Lassiter straightened himself. He watched his daughter come toward them, and smiled. . . .

THE END

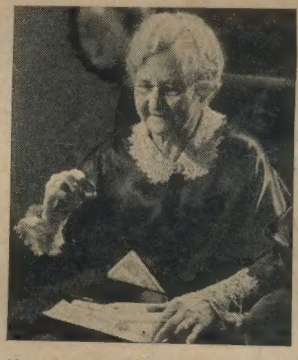
FORTUNE IN CASH PAID FOR OLD MONEY

A "Penny From Heaven" dropped into the hands of J. D. Martin of Virginia, who found an old copper cent, for which Max Mehl, the Texas Money King, paid him $200.00.

Mrs. F. G. Adams, a ticket seller in a movie theatre in Virginia, received a silver dollar for a ticket. She noticed it was minted in 1804. Now this silver dollar lists up to $2,500. Learn about the value of old coins by writing to Max Mehl of Fort Worth, Texas.

Valuable old coins turn up in most unexpected places. Mr. J. Brownlee of Georgia, doing some excavating, found an old coin for which Max Mehl paid him $1,000. Learn about Rare Coins so you will know how to quickly recognize them.

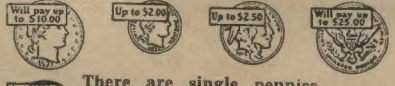
An interesting incident is that the man who changed a dollar in his tobacco store and one of the small coins he received was later sold for $200.00. Send coupon below to Max Mehl so that you will be able to recognize valuable old coins.



Mrs. Dowty of Texas sold a silver half dollar to Max Mehl for $400. You, too, may run across a rare coin worth a large sum. Post yourself so that you will not pass it unrecognized.

B. Max Mehl, one of the world's greatest authorities on old money, during the last 41 years has bought hundreds of thousands of coins and has paid big cash premiums for them.

Old coins turn up everywhere. Max Mehl recently paid a Florida man $750.00 for one coin that he obtained from an indian. Write Mr. Mehl for his illustrated folder so that you will be able to recognize valuable coins.



There are single pennies that sell for a hundred dollars; nickels worth many dollars; dimes, quarters, half dollars and dollars on which we will pay BIG CASH PREMIUMS. Max Mehl will pay up to $25.00 for 1901 quarters S. Mint; $2.50 for a nickel as recent as a 1926 S. Mint; a dime of 1916 D. Mint will bring up to $2.00, showing that even a number of recent coins are worth many times their face value. Knowing about coins pays. Andrew Henry of Idaho was paid $900.00 for one half dollar received in change. Today or tomorrow a valuable coin may come into your possession. There are also old bills and stamps worth fortunes. Learn how to know their value.

IT PAYS TO BE POSTED

Send coupon for Big Illustrated COIN FOLDER, full of valuable information on the profits that may be made from OLD MONEY, BILLS and STAMPS.

FILL OUT and MAIL NOW!

To B. MAX MEHL,
310 Mehl Bldg., Fort Worth, Tex.

Dear Mr. Mehl: Please send me your Large Illustrated Coin and Stamp Folder and further particulars for which I enclose 4 cents.

Name .....

Address .....

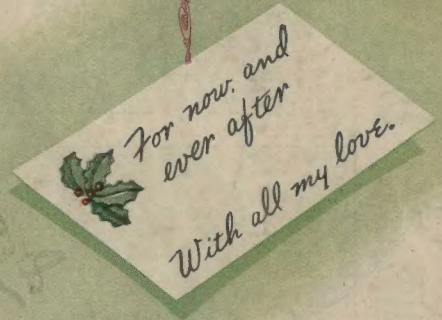
City .....

State .....

LADY SHEAFFER
Lifetime **Feathertouch Ensemble, $12.25**

THE WHITE DOT IDENTIFIES THE *Lifetime PEN**

VIGILANT
Lifetime **Feather-touch Ensemble (Military Clip), $12.75. Other Ensembles (Military Clip), $6, $9, $14**



SHEAFFER'S *Lifetime** Feathertouch
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

GIFTS THAT LIVE While Sentiment Lasts

You're trying to say, "My feeling for you is genuine and lasting." "I want to be in your life while life endures." But—how to say it so that it can't be forgotten? Will you express your feeling with a gift that's soon worn out, or a gift that's merely expensive? NO! Give a Sheaffer's *Lifetime**. It is the finest gift of its kind, and it is guaranteed for the life of its owner, as enduring and fine as your own sentiment. When you say it with a Sheaffer's *Lifetime*, you say it for all time! W. A. Sheaffer Pen Co., Fort Madison, Iowa; Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

*All *Lifetime* pens are unconditionally guaranteed for the life of the owner except against loss and willful damage—when serviced, if complete pen is returned, subject only to insurance, postage, handling charge—35c.

SHEAFFER PENS, ALL COLORS, $2.75 TO $20. PENCILS, $1 UP. ENSEMBLES, $3.95 UP. DRYPROOF DESK SETS, $5 UP.

CRAFTSMAN Ensemble, $5

$7.50 with pen

CARRY YOUR *Skrip*
IN THIS TOUGH, SAFE, PLASTIC CONTAINER
Safe in your pocket, kit or traveling bag, and would be a bargain, unfilled, at 50c; you get your SKRIP Free.
50c

Copyright, 1941, W. A. Sheaffer Pen Co.
* Trademark Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

NEW WESTERN MAGAZINE

® 10¢ JANUARY

THE FOUR JEPPSON BROTHERS FIGHT AGAIN, IN—

HELL ON BEARCAT MOUNTAIN

A NOVELETTE by ELI COLTER

SATAN'S KILLERS RIDE AT NIGHT!

by JOHN G. PEARSOL

FOWLER
REPP
KESLER
AND OTHERS!